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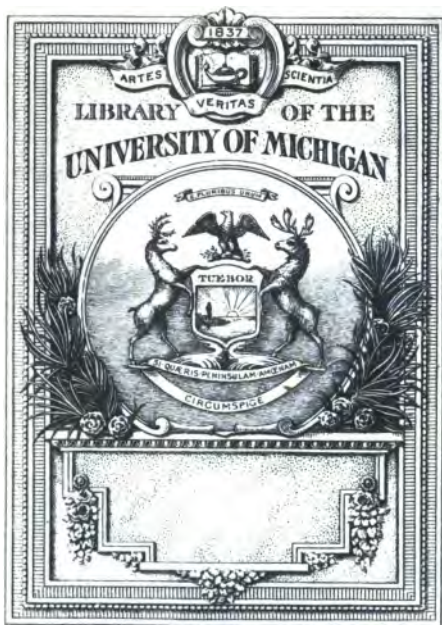
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A L M I R A.

BEING THE

H I S T O R Y

OF A

Y O U N G L A D Y

Of good Birth and Fortune, but more
distinguish'd Merit.

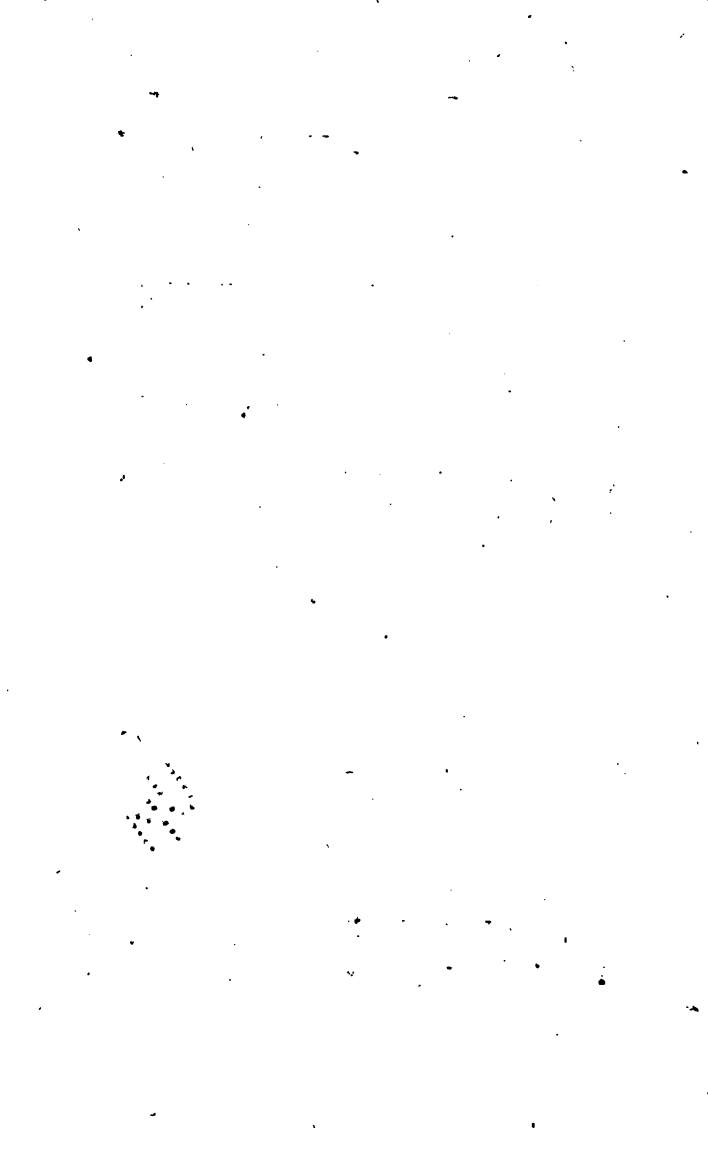
VOL. I.



L O N D O N :

Printed for W. OWEN, near Temple-Bar.

M.DCC.LXII.



English
Rabel
2-18-27
144/6
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THE
P R E F A C E
TO THE
R E A D E R.

THE author of these following sheets,
is not without due apprehension from
the judgment of the impartial critic;
to whom every individual of each class of
writers (and consequently scribblers) should
submit with pleasure.

If, therefore, any such shall find they
have thrown away some hours in reading
what these following sheets contain, let
their humanity intreat permission of their
judgment to accept this truth as an apo-
logy: That a motive, much more excusable
than any vanity had been, guided the pen
that undertook it, to amuse the leisure
A hours

hours of one whose thoughts had been, and were, so much imbittered by the most afflicting troubles, that there is little room for wonder, if they find the proper sweets and requisites of sense and diction wanting.

Nor had an undertaking of this nature been attempted, but for the importunity of a few kind and partial friends ; who had entertained, perhaps, too favourable an opinion of the abilities of one, whom they wished to find both meritorious and successful in such an undertaking.

It probably may be remarked by some readers, that there are here no characters exalted above what we can expect to see in human life. 'Tis granted ; rather below it certainly. The author is quite sensible of that deficiency ; and, therefore, begs the reader's leave, to offer the following reason.

That, having not the vain presumption to form patterns for the world, it was judged most proper to attempt no more than to become an humble copier of nature only ;
endea-

endeavouring tho', to have a due regard to moral justice, thro' the plan; that if the whole is found too insignificant to do more good, than innocently entertain an hour or two, it may, at least, enforce no bad example, by representing virtue made too wretched, or vice triumphant—A dangerous precedent for youthful readers!

Yet the author had not an opinion high enough, of this performance, to furnish courage for its publication, after having finished it seven years, had not a motive, that was judged to be most laudable, encouraged it,—the hope of making it prove serviceable to some unhappy individuals, whom it is designed to benefit.

And, in an age where public acts of great benevolence are so extensive and so nobly conspicuous, it is not probable, that one of the same nature (tho' of a more private tendency) should fail of meeting with a just reception from the multitude of humane readers.

This little history labours under one great disadvantage: The many (and some
of

of them worthily approved) foregoing pieces of the like turn of writing, which have been many years past exhibited.—Yet novelty may always hope to please a little; tho' it is not always alike meritorious, and capable of charming.

And, if this piece shall prove so fortunate, as not to merit the candid reader's disapprobation, the writer of it will, with gratitude and pleasure, acknowledge, that those hours were not mispent in which it has been written.



THE
HISTORY
OF
ALMIRA.

ALMIRA was the only daughter of a worthy merchant in the city of London. Her education having been intrusted to my care as governess, for the instructing her young mind, I must be best acquainted with the excellencies of it. For, from the time her infant innocence found power of utterance, I have been honoured with the pleasing charge, till within these twelvemonths past; when

her good father kindly and generously recompenced my trouble, as he was pleased to call it, by making me a present of five hundred pounds (additional to what I had laid up, out of his yearly bounty) by way of fortune, to a gentleman of merit and estate, who had the uncommon generosity to think me worth desiring as a wife, in case (he said) I was not worth a shilling. Nor could a change less happy than my present one, with this most worthy husband, have reconciled me to the recollection of having left so kind and amiable a lady !

'Tis from the letters I have been honoured with from her (according to her own obliging promise when we parted) that I have formed the following sheets ; and, as I judged they might agreeably amuse a leisure hour, and likewise tend to edify young readers, I have obtained her leave to make them public ; but with this restriction, that I should make use of only such imaginary names as those herein contained.

For tho' a character, like hers, in any light, might, with advantage to itself, be offered to public view ; yet her modesty

is

is so great,—a modesty divested of all ostentation, that tho' she might be certain she would attract the admiration of her readers, yet would she not, on any account, admit the thought of being known in print.

If, therefore, our fictitious names should cast a kind of romantic air upon the following particulars, I hope it will be pardoned. And common names have been avoided, for fear of giving offence to any persons who might be of the same.

Almira's father had a fortune with her mother of ten thousand pounds ; and, being always prosperous in his merchandizing, acquired, during the years he followed business, twenty thousand more. And then, finding his health decline apace, and having lost a wife he loved most tenderly, he settled his affairs, and quitted London wholly. Soon after which, a complication of distempers seized him ; and, notwithstanding the best advice that could be had for him, nature drooped daily more and more, and warned him of his approaching end ; which he, as a just man and a Christian, looked upon with chearful resignation.

THE HISTORY

But as often as he thought of his dear girl, and the variety of dangers to which her youth and fortune might expose her; a sigh would rise from his most tender, aching heart! which generally finding a relief in tears, ended in fervent prayers, for blessings to attend her days, when he no more could aid her with protection.

Having made his will, wherein he had settled all his fortune (excepting a few benevolent legacies) upon his daughter, he sent a messenger away for his sister, who lived a few miles off. This lady was a widow who possessed an easy fortune, and had one child, a son, just then of age, whom she had brought up to the law; and he (being then out of his clerkship) was just returned to live with her.

He received her with his usual brotherly tenderness; and, when they were alone, with a melancholy air thus addressed himself to her:

“ My dear Crudelia, said he, I beg you will observe, with great attention, all I am about to say to you, as it concerns my
peace

peace of mind in these the last, the few remaining moments of my life.

“ You are to have the care of my dear child Almira, (dear orphan, shortly she will be !) a care, that will, I hope, be attended with pleasure, because of her sweetness of temper, and many excellent qualities ! She was too young, ever to know the blessing of a mother, when Heaven deprived her of so great a one. Let both parents henceforth be found in your indulgent care and tenderness : you always loved my Mira ; and, as you have no daughter, I make no doubt but you will look upon her as your own, and treat her as if she was such.

“ We have, you know, always (setting aside the partiality of a fond father) found reason, from her infancy to the present hour, to think that she cannot stand in need of rigour ; nor has she (that is my comfort) ever felt it.

“ She is allowed, by all who know her, to be happy in the graces of person ; yet are those the smallest of her merit. Those of her mind surpass her years ; and hither-

to have proved her worthy of being trusted with herself;—a dangerous charge, I own, to most young women of her age! If, therefore, she should happen, among the many suitors, whom her form or fortune must attract, to fix regard on one whom you may think inferior to her, (according to the general way of judging) if he be in every other respect unobjectible, cross not, I beg of you, her choice; not even by advice, or the most distant hint of your disapprobation; lest her obedience to your wish should render her unhappy. She is incapable of placing her affection upon a worthless object, and her own fortune is large enough for happiness.

“ Upon her day of marriage, or (if unmarried) when of age, she is to be in full possession of her fortune. Heaven bless her with it! and may she know as much felicity in the possession of it, as I receive delight from the reflection of my being blest with power to leave it her.

“ Be kind to poor Cleone likewise; you will find that I have not forgot her: pray give her that, when I am gone. Nor have
I, my

"I, my dear sister, been forgetful of yourself and son, as a pre-acknowledgment of gratitude, for all the future care and kindness which I may be indebted to you for, on my dear girl's account."

Almira, who was then in her own apartment, (which joined to his) heard all her father said; and was so much affected with his paternal goodness to her, and high opinion of her, (as what good and grateful daughter would not?) that she fell into a violent flood of grateful tears, which she could not suppress for several hours.

Crudelia solemnly assured him, she would, in every respect, fulfill his last request; and intreated him to set his mind intirely at rest on that account; adding, that yet she hoped he would himself live long enough to have the satisfaction of seeing her well settled in a married state. But, alas! that wish proved soon as fruitless as it might be insincere; for, in a short time after, she was called to execute this trust. The tender father died, and the disconsolate Almira was taken home to her aunt's house.

Crudelia's disposition was quite unlike that of her brother; she was avaricious, and not unartful. Her husband was a worthy man, and had left his fortune wholly at her disposal. She had, as was before said, brought up her son a lawyer: his morals were indeed much more adapted to the obliquities of that profession, than his understanding; for having, thro' his childhood, shared too largely of maternal folly, (for fondness, void of judgment, can deserve no milder name) study appeared too great a labour for his tender intellects.

His father died when he was but an infant, or his mind had stood a chance of being better cultivated; for his father had abilities, and a knowledge, much superior to that of his wife; a case that does not always happen neither; since we sometimes see the contrary; and that the prerogatives assumed by the other sex, do not always confer masculine accomplishments; though, from tyrannic custom, we annex implicitly (too often) inferiority to woman.

This young gentleman had a sort of wild good-nature; a quality, that, unpruned by
reason,

reason, proves often a great misfortune to the person who possesses it. This, added to a low, ill-grounded pride, to be at all times the monarch of his company, misled him into many inconveniences, which proved greatly prejudicial to his person, mind, and circumstances; the last of which, indeed, his mother chiefly suffered by, to her great sorrow! as nothing stood in competition with her love of money, but her tenderness for her son.

The lovely orphan was no sooner with her aunt, than Crudelia began to look with wishful eyes upon so large a fortune; and avarice being her prevailing passion, she soon forgot the strict injunctions of a dying brother. She knew, in case Almira should not marry, that she, or her Flavillo, (should they out-live her) might succeed to it: but, that a person so attractive, should be permitted to live single, was hardly to be expected: and as she was in two years more, to be quite mistress of herself, she apprehended there were small hopes that either of them would ever be the better for it. But soon a thought, that sprung from sordid selfishness, and was supported and
en-

encouraged by it, gave vigour to her hopes. Her son, the young Flavillo, had certainly (she thought) accomplishments that could not be withstood; for as she saw, or felt, no fault he had, but that of being too extravagant, (which marriage too might cure him of) she soon determined to propose to him, to lose no time in gaining the affections of his cousin, making no doubt of his success, as all she thought would see with her love-clouded eyes. Accordingly, she soon told him her view, enforcing it by adding, that it was her command he should immediately pursue it.

But how surprized and disconcerted was she to observe, that he received with much reluctance this imagined agreeable proposal; replying, that he thought they were too nearly related to permit their marrying. That argument had, with Crudelia, very little force; and, therefore, she by threatening intimations, extorted from him a promise to proceed immediately in this affair.

Accordingly, a short time after, as he was sitting with his cousin, (the dinner being just over) and his mother, desirous of every

every opportunity of leaving them together, quitting the room ; just as Almira was about to rise and follow her, Flavillo, with an abrupt and aukward air, seized on her hand, and begged her to sit still, for he had something he must say to her. She very obligingly retained her seat ; and thus he addressed her :

“ Cousin, said he, I have a secret to intrust you with, that is to me of great importance, and it regards you likewise. My mother, you must know, intends you for my wife ; and you are, doubtless, deserving of a better husband. Were I not otherways engaged, there is no one I would so soon have chosen for life, I will assure you.”

Almira had, by this time, scarce patience left, and with difficulty composed herself to a calmness capable of answering at all to so unexpected a communication of his mother's view.

“ This is, indeed, said she, a piece of news that has, I own, surprized me greatly. But pray, good cousin, spare yourself the needless pains of any more apologies, relating

lating to your pre-engagement ; since, had you been as free in your affections as, thank Heaven ! I am, we certainly must have continued so, as to each other ; at least, I answer for myself. And pray acquaint your mother, sir, (I should have said my aunt perhaps, but anger often overpowers respect) that I am every way too free, thanks to the best of fathers, to be at all at her disposal. Excuse the warmth with which I make this declaration, since 'tis the least my just resentment can be satisfied with."

" Madam, replied Flavillo, I hope you are not displeased with me, for what I have said, (looking quite out of countenance) and be so kind, I beg it of you, not to discover what I have told you of my pre-engagement ; for, if my mother knew it, it might prove my utter ruin ! You know, madam, that she has her humours ; tho' interest is, I know, her favourite point in view ; but, for my part, I own I am of another way of thinking quite ; and happiness is what I chiefly aim at ; yet I, perhaps, may find myself mistaken, as others have been before me. However, I will (if you think proper, cousin)

cousin) inform her only, that my addressee are refused. What think you? will not that be my best answer?"

Truth is, undoubtedly, the best reply, returned Almira, with a smile, that both implied due scorn and pity; but with which he was perfectly well satisfied, mistaking the smile for one of approbation.

She immediately withdrew, to contemplate on what had passed, and to meditate what measures she should take, dreading many uneasy consequences from the circumstances of this affair: yet was she delighted that so fortunate a one was on her side, as that of his being pre-engaged; as most undoubtedly it would make her task much lighter, than otherwise it would have probably been.

She was just then but nineteen years of age, and there must be two years to come (and they might prove of wretchedness, she apprehended, from this communication of her aunt's interested scheme) before she was to be released from being under her tuition, unless she was to marry; and that she
had

had too much discretion to allow herself to think of ; till a person should offer, who, by the qualities of his mind, as well as by the agreeableness of his person and manners, was likely to make her truly happy.

She had already been addressed by a number of such as the world calls humble servants ; but she thought them all unworthy of her favour, notwithstanding one of them was a nobleman of splendid fortune ! His years indeed might seem to lessen, in some measure, the merit of Almira's refusal of him, he being upwards of sixty. But then his title and estate, would, with many women, have covered that disparity. Pride often turns the scale even against affection ; but here it could not influence prudence : for, had his lordship been a much younger man than he was, his character was in other respects very exceptionable. He had been so from his youth upwards ; and she knew that a wife could promise herself no great justice, much less happiness, from a man who lived, as it were, in defiance of his first duties.

Crude-

Crudelia, judging her niece (no doubt) by herself, was much alarmed on the repeated visits of this nobleman, and was resolved to frustrate his success, if possible. And the first means she used, was, never to quit the room while he was there; and quickly, by her altered carriage, she convinced him, that his shortest visits to her niece were the most agreeable to herself. Nor would her fair niece have been behind-hand with her in expressing her disapprobation of his visits, on her account, had she not thought proper (in order to convince her aunt that she had no thought of encouraging an address, more than equally odious to her, from her son) to put on an appearance of being not altogether so much averse to the other offer, as in reality she was.

This so exasperated Crudelia, that she began to treat Almira in a manner she never had before experienced, and therefore she less knew how to bear it. And had she not been conscious how far her management and power (tho' an executrix) was limited, she would, I make no question, have carried it to very great extremes.

This

This added to the grief Almira so sincerely felt before, for her dear father's death. And, had she not been happy in the conversation of her companion and favourite Cleone, she had been wholly void of comfort. But this young gentlewoman was mistress of a solid understanding, enlivened by a sprightly turn of conversation, that rendered her as entertaining as instructive. She was the daughter of a gentleman reported to have died abroad; and, having lost her mother in her infancy, was, by her nearest surviving relation, sent into France for education, to accomplish her for such a genteel employment as she had the happiness to meet with. And this intention being (it was said) intimated to Almira's father, who was acquainted with her family (as in the following sheets will further be related), upon the marriage of her governess, mentioned before, he sent for this young gentlewoman over to make her a companion for his daughter. She took so great a liking to her, that she treated her more like a sister than a dependant lady. A laudable example! to the unfeeling, and, I may add, inhuman sort of mortals! A part of the creation, who dare call them-

themselves good Christians ; yet can take a barbarous pride, and pleasure, in using those with a distinguishable cruelty, who were born with happier expectations.

The discreet Cleone advised Almira to smother all resentment, for some time at least, since she was unfortunately under Crudelia's care ; and urged her to amuse her mind more frequently with company, and those diversions which were to her the most agreeable ; among which, good plays were always foremost in Almira's choice.

Accordingly, one evening, she consented, with Cleone, to go and see the tragedy of Richard the third ;—the part of Richard was performed by Mr. Garrick ; and was so admirably acted, that it gave pain, not pleasure, to them both. What griefs of various sorts, do unreflecting minds escape ! yet should they not be envied ; for they likewise escape true pleasure also. Almira most sincerely felt, and wept, the horrid uncle's cruelty ! and whisper'd to Cleone, Well, thank Heaven ! my aunt is not like this

vile uncle. I shall find comfort from this evening's entertainment ; and love, or at least bear her usage better, from frequently remembering the comparison.

During the performance that night, a gentleman, in the next box to theirs, seemed more attracted by Almira than by all he saw upon the stage. His observation of her was so particular, that it was impossible for her not to perceive it ; and, the confusion it occasioned, served to increase the natural blush of beauty, with which she was adorned ; assurance having been able to acquire no influence on her features, however recommended by the fashion.

When the play was over, he offered her his hand (respectfully) to lead her to her coach, as he perceived she had no gentleman to guard her thro' the crowd, which being then extremely great and noisy, she permitted ; and he retreated with a respectful modest bow, yet seem'd in some anxiety of mind to speak to her, at his taking leave of them, but did not.

As soon as they were seated in the coach, Cleone (smiling) told Almira, that she had made a visible addition to the list of her admirers ; and asked her what she thought of him ? for that his thoughts of her had been revealed to the whole audience, if the apparent language of his eyes were understood by them, as well as her.

I think, Cleone, he is agreeable enough in person, (returned Almira) tho' I did not much observe him ; it favours greatly of confidence, and vain self-approbation, to return the notice (as I have seen some do) which it is often almost impossible for one not to be conscious of.

Then, madam, (hastily resumed Cleone) he is desirous now to give you further opportunity to view him better ; for there he flies (almost) to suit your horses pace, and most politely guard you home. Poor man ! I find his heart has quite evaporated thro' his eyes, and he is now pursuing you as the receiver of it. Where ? which is he, Cleone ? you but fancy so ; I cannot see him, cried Almira.

There he is, dressed in black, returned Cleone, stopped by a gentlemen this moment, madam; see, there! there! nay, now he is out of sight: ah, friend! whoever thou art, I am sure thy compliments he would have gladly spared at present.

The coach drove fast; and, as he was some time detained, they saw no more of their knight-errant. But, in a short time after they came home, their conversation took a turn less chearful; for the aunt, whose interested views made her be ever fearful of her neice's being seen in any public place, having been told that she was going to the play, and hearing to which house, she had been there herself, and sat unseen by them, in order to observe who might be near Almira, taking no servant with her; and, having heedfully attended to what has been related, she entered some time after them with jealous anger in her countenance, (tho' both Almira and her friend were ignorant of the occasion for some little time, but long she could not hide it) and addressed her neice as follows:

“ Madam,

“ Madam, I understand you have been entertaining your ears with a diversion, that, in my opinion, but corrupts the heart ; I should be better pleased, while I am answerable for your conduct, if you would choose amusements less pernicious ; for I have seldom known an instance where these plays did any good ; but many sorts of mischief I have seen them prove the cause of.”

“ Madam, I am surprized (replied the half-affrighted and half-angry neice) that you should thus condemn, promiscuously, an entertainment that has been so much esteemed, by the best judges, as the noblest and most edifying of all diversions ! else, why do many of our great schools of learning suffer them frequently to be the practice of their pupils ? good ones I only mean to plead in favour of, for there are many which, I think, a woman, who can blush thro’ modesty, would not be seen at.”

“ Why do they suffer them, (impatiently Crudelia cried) because they are not wise enough to break a foolish cus-

tom, most edifying, truly ! Yes, they do edify indeed : but, had I twenty daughters, they should all be sent to edify in some more proper place. This I am sure of, if they should happen to have only one faint spark of evil in their disposition, it would be kindly aided to become a towering flame, ere long, by such assistants ! Yes, I suppose, poor Cynthia likewise went to edify ; who, after one fictitious tragedy was ended, began herself a real one ; but you, perhaps, have never heard her story. She was trepanned by a designing lover ; who, taking the advantage of the crowd when they came out, led her from the rest of her company ; and, telling her they should overtake them soon, (and, by agreement, they were all to sup together) he thus deceived her into a tavern proper for his purpose ; where, notwithstanding innocence, and prayers, and tears, he ruined her ! and left her recollection room to entertain her, the remainder of her days, with how much she had edified.

Almira

Almira (somewhat frightened at this melancholy story) replied, But don't you think, madam, this might have happened at any other public place? however, since I see you have your reasons for disliking them, I have no one so prevalent, but I can give it up with great composure, if it will make you easier.—I own, I give the preference to that, of all the pleasures this great town affords; but it were no compliment, indeed, to yield a sacrifice to you, that was to me indifferent.

And thus did the obliging Almira deprive herself, by her condescending disposition, of a diversion that might have often relieved her melancholy hours, as she adhered too strictly to the compliance she had made an austere aunt: for, tho' she naturally possessed a happy chearfulness of temper, she had now too great a tendency to grief and solitude; and seldom could, by kind Cleone, be prevailed upon even to make a friendly visit: for, as to fashionable frothy ones, she was too wise (tho' young and amiable) to throw her time away on any one of them.

Cleone told her (after Crudeha left them) she had been thinking, and had called to mind, a person whom she thought their unknown cavallier somewhat resembled ; adding, you will, I am certain, madam, think as I do ; your unfortunate Samander is the person : excuse me, that I still forget myself, and call him so ! since yours he would have been, had you permitted him ; and, you well know, I ever pitied him.

And, if I did not know it, (replied Almira) that sigh would certainly, my dear, confirm the truth of it. But, believe me, I might have stood in need of your kind pity, more than he does now, if I had been weak enough to let a preference of personal accomplishments have biaſſed me, at the expence of reason, and religious as well as moral judgment. I was, you know, at first, rather too partial to his mistaken merit ; and, therefore, thought it perfect, till I was happily convinced of my mistake, by one unguarded conversation, but one week (I think) before I was to have been given to him by my good father, who had

had likewise been deceived in him. And I have often felt thankful reflections at my heart, upon the fortunate discovery. Rallery, I own, I much dislike, when its impertinence presumes to play too freely with poor terrestrial friendship! But, when it dares pretend to invade the sacred and incomprehensible celestial attributes! the wound that gives my soul is as a poisoned arrow to the body, and admits no healing. Could I have even hoped to keep possession of that heart's fidelity, who was, or seemed to be, an infidel to Him who made him! No, surely. And, as I was commended for my conduct, by the wisest and best of parents, Cleone cannot, upon cool reflection, surely, blame me.

It was those perfections which I fancied I perceived inhabiting his mind, and only they, which first prevailed with me to think more favourably of him, than any other man I had been addressed by. But, when I found so capital a blemish in that mind, it was undoubtedly my duty to discard him. For, tho' our thoughts, no doubt, are free, yet your free-

free-thinkers as they are called, I ever disapproved allowing my ear to lend attention to,

But thou art partial to his personal accomplishments, in thinking the unknown gentleman like him; for, if I observed him justly, there was a kind of modest majesty in his deportment, which Samander wanted.

Thus ended their discourse that night; and, on the following day, Almira received a message from Amanda, to beg the favour of her company that afternoon; which only by her companion's persuasion, she unwillingly consented to (Cleone being a little indisposed.)

Amanda was a lady in their neighbourhood; who (tho' a new acquaintance,) was one for whom Almira had a great esteem; she being a person of fine sense, with gentle manners.

They became acquainted, by sitting both in the same pew at church, but Credulia's austerity of temper, had deprived

prived them of that intimacy, which would have been the most agreeable between such neighbours; and a person of a studious, or melancholy disposition (such as Almira's was.) ought to allow herself those reasonable sort of comforts frequently, in order to allay affliction: but commonly the weakest minds, with stronger willingness, can fly to such relief.

Cleone, being (as I observed) a little indisposed that day, did not accompany Almira to Amanda's.—But how surprized was poor Almira! as she had just received a dish of tea, to see the beforementioned unknown gallant enter the room: he paid his compliments to those, for whom his visit was alone designed, but when his eyes in the most graceful manner went round the circle, to take in the company, they stopt at her; and a visible confusion overspread his countenance and whole deportment, to the apparent astonishment of all who saw it, excepting her, who wholly caused it. And she returned the favourable distinction, in a sympathizing involuntary

tary consciousness; for from the moment he approached them, she seemed to catch the soft surprize, which only by a deeper blush had been perceived, but that the gentle trembling of her dish of tea, betrayed the nerve's disorder, which supported it.

It was some time before Florello summoned up his fortitude of mind, sufficiently to utter any thing; and when he did, the hesitative manner it was spoken in, plainly discovered that some emotion strongly operated on his spirits, which ever used to be chearful, polite, and easy, and it had left such an effect on his complexion likewise, that it was impossible for it to pass unnoticed.

Amanda therefore thus addressed him, I am afraid, my friend (if I may judge from your repeated change of countenance since you sat down) you are not well, or something has surprized you in this room: I think I have heard you say, you have no antipathy to animals.

Madam

Madam (replied Florello,) I confess I was surprized ! but 'twas agreeably indeed, and needs no pity, though its effect occasioned some disorder in my mind ; but I am better now. Our features are the treacherous tell-tales of our hearts, especially to such a penetrating eye as yours is, madam.—That lady (pointing genteely towards Almira) will, I hope, have the goodness to forgive me, when I declare that she, though innocently, was the cause of my disorder, by being the strongest likeness nature could possibly produce, of one whose image must be ever dear to me ! and such an unexpected pleasure, mingled with some degree of pain (such give me leave to call it madam,) rushing upon my imagination unprepared, had for a while almost overset it.

Almira blushed, and bowing told him, that intention having had no hand in this, there was scarce room to ask his pardon for it : but that she was sorry, notwithstanding, she had been the cause of his indisposition.

. He smiled, with conscious sensibility, but had no power to answer her, and both seemed then alike desirous to drop the subject, and a variety of general topics soon succeeded. But both the eyes and ears of the revived Florello, were attached to one fair object! nor could he join with his accustomed wit and sprightliness, in any conversation. —How strange it is, that where a man would wish to make himself appear most bright, (as always is the lover's case, in company with the beloved,) the unaccountableness of perverse human nature spreads some dark cloud over every accomplishment, as if on purpose to obscure its lustre! and it might truly have been said of poor Florello, “ He “ never looked so like the thing he is “ not, as you now see him.”

Soon after tea was over, Almira took her leave, he starting from his chair, prepared to follow, as if to intreat the favour of her hand as formerly, to lead her to her coach; but in a moments time drew back, and re-assumed his place in some confusion, where we will
leave

leave him for the present, and accompany (tho' he did not) the fair-one home.

She hastened to the chamber of her loved Cleone, to unbosom there that which had much affected her; and, finding her much better than she left her, she thus began to entertain her with the visit.

“ O, my Cleone! thy indisposition has deprived thee of a most diverting scene! in which, two unacquainted fools have been the principal performers. Hadst thou been well, or with me, thy friend had not been one of them; thy illness certainly possessed my spirits, and I was scarce myself this afternoon; I wish, methinks, I had put my visit off, and staid at home with thee; but, it was thy fault that I did not. Who dost thou think drank tea with us, and is acquainted with Amanda? No other than our theatrical cavallier! but his behaviour it is impossible to tell thee; nothing but mine could equal it; and nothing less than supernatural, could have amazed me more than seeing him there. The company perceived the visible confusion
he

he was in, and that obliged him to confess the cause. But I, who had no cause, indeed, had nothing I could say, by way of an apology, for the confusion which I am sure my foolish fiery cheeks discovered when he first came in."

Cleone, who had seven years more experience than her friend, joined to the quickest apprehension, thus declared her thoughts on what she had heard. Alas! my dear, there is most certainly a cause you have, that yet, perhaps, you know not. There is a certain soft, but subtle poison, that can find an entrance at the eyes, whose influence quickly operates thro' the young unsuspecting heart! and, from the heart's disorder, the whole human frame is affected. But, pray, what reason served for his excuse? for such you will surely find it was hereafter.

"It was, returned Almira, that I had the honour to resemble one, he either is, or has been fond of, that has, it seems, intitled me to the being stared so out of countenance. Methinks I should be pleased to see this lady, so much like myself;

myself; yet, it is a selfish and a silly curiosity, since I may never see the author of it more, for by his conversation I perceived he seldom comes to London. —But pray, Cleone, what was that you said just now, concerning eyes and hearts, and poison?”

Just then a servant brought her up a letter, which opening, she found the following contents.

“Most admirable lady!

YOU cannot be a stranger to the passion which I have the honour to be wretched by, as I have never yet had hope sufficient to support me, even with courage to declare myself, when in your presence, as I ought.

“I sigh with the consideration, that I am unworthy of you in every light but one, and fortune is, I own, a trifle, if weighed against your merit.

“If you can force your generous soul to pity me, by suffering a wretch to live for you instead of misery, his for-

tune wholly you command forever, with the whole soul and will of him, whose fate you govern, while he has life to call himself,

Dearest madam,

Your most respectfully devoted,
and most obedient
humble servant,

HONORIO.

P. S. Allow me, good and dearest lady, to receive my doom, (however horrid it may be,) when next I have the honour to attend you."

This letter caused Almira at this time no small embarrassment, how she should act with prudence and strict honour; for, (as I have observed before,) she found herself under a disagreeable necessity of bearing with this lord's addresses, to defend her from her fordid aunt's more odious proposition, with relation to her son; for often do we see mean minds, such as Crudelia's was, intimi-

intimidated by superior grandeur to their own, who would reign tyrants over every superiority of virtue.

What to resolve she therefore knew not, and she was now compelled to speak more plainly, than she wished to speak at present; nor could her kind companion offer any thing as her advice in this, but what agreed intirely with Almira's; so much in every case, where delicacy or honour was concerned, they thought alike.

A few days after she had received this letter, my lord, impatient for her answer, came: he found Almira at her spinnet just after dinner, and alone; an opportunity for his knowing with certainty, what he before had only feared.

Madam, said he, approaching her with a profound respect; whatever destiny you mean for me, have still that goodness which is consistent with yourself, and tell it me unfrowning.

If it is the sentence of my future misery, it were unjust to reproach you, even in thought, nor would I dare henceforth to offend your pity with one sigh, out of the many thousands it must cost me.

There was she thought so much good sense, respect, and dignity, in all he said; that it was with equal pain and pity she found power to answer, telling him, that she held the high regard which he professed for her, an honour, as his high rank in life, was too unexceptionable to admit of an objection. But she must beg him to allow her to continue an alliance with his friendship only, since she, in more than that, could never think of acquiescing, it having always been her opinion, that a parity of years and tempers, should be regarded as a principle, towards rendering the marriage state agreeable.

His judgment could not help agreeing, though in so unwished a sentence against himself; adding, that he must only beg permission to make one refusal

fatal on his part, as only he could prove the loser by it; it were (continued he) a fruitless effort, in the ablest physician, to attempt the patient's cure by nourishing the malady; and such must be my case, dear madam, were I thus any longer to indulge my eyes and ears, when at my heart's expence, with all that has so powerfully delighted them.—And it were to court new torments in the observation of a scene most dreaded! some more deserving, or more happy lover! no, let me, thus unhappily defeated, now retreat! nor by returning suffer still more cruelly.

I therefore humbly take my leave for ever, and may your future days be happy, as mine must be wretched.

Just as he spoke these words, and took his leave, with visible emotion in his eyes and features, Crudelia entered the apartment, and by a conscious exultation in her look, discovered she had heard him, which greatly terrified the justly grounded apprehension of her gentle niece: she thought this was no doubt

the luckiest opportunity to sound Almira's way of thinking, therefore asked her sneeringly, what other lover had expelled so great a star from her horizon? but in a moment, with a kinder look and accent, as if from recollective hope, that this event might probably have sprung from a secret preference of her son, she begged her pardon for being so inquisitive.

Mira, said she, I cannot look on you in any other light but that of my dear daughter, and that tender name, you know, will justify my care and assiduity in all respects concerning you.—Such though you were not born, I cannot cease from wishing you, and such, dear Mira, you have in your power to make yourself at any time.

Almira knew too well, but would not seem to understand her meaning, and most evasively, obligingly replied, that she was sensible how much she was obliged for being looked upon by her in such a manner, and hoped she never should give any reasonable cause for her

to lessen her regard ;—but caught the earliest opportunity to change the subject, which the most welcome sight of her approaching friend Cleone gave her; and Credulia re-assumed her gloom of features, from the baulk her hopes had met with, in her neice's too evasive answer ; and every word she uttered after this, was full of visible distrust and fear; and anger, seemingly lay but unwillingly suppressed, by all her little stock of prudence, which made the life of this deserving lady, grow hourly more unhappy.

But such was her superior goodness, that she resolved to drive resentment from her thoughts, unless so much provoked, that sense and reason would be sufferers by her forbearance.

Yet had she been more wretched in this melancholy situation, had she not been mistress of that power, to find within herself that satisfaction, which too many maidens of her years, and fortune, take the trouble to hunt abroad, though very often in the fruitless search

of. Reflection was to her an ever welcome guest, and served both as an entertaining friend, and prudent counsellor, that taught her mind rather to meet with pity, than disgust, the tedious train of foibles, to which human nature is incident ; and she would often say, as she was liable to err herself, as well as other mortals, patience was but a kind of selfish charity, though seemingly bestowed on others, and a duty indispensable. Books were her chief delight, and, having a taste and genius too for poetry, sometimes she would amuse herself in writing verses, of which the following pages give some samples.

Her time was therefore never burthen some without the aid of cards or company, and needlework would often make a part of her employment, but it was such as proved agreeable and useful ; nor did she think it worthy commendation for a lady to deprive her eyes of power, to make a better use of them ; only to have it said, that she had humbly imitated at the best, a piece of lace with which her milliner, without such loss of
time

time and trouble, could have furnished her.

But I should be too tedious for my readers, should I proceed with the detail of her accomplishments and virtues ; I therefore will resume her story.

It was not long before Amanda sent in order to return her visit ; a visit, which had left no faint impression on the heart of her, whose soul would not allow her to believe, to what true cause she owed its strong effect, and that the tenderest of prepossessions had usurped an empire in her breast.

Now as Amanda was a woman of a gay and witty turn of temper, she could not slip the opportunity so lately given her of rallying Almira ; and she was scarce sat down before she thus began.

A fine young lady, truly ! pray, what amends do you intend to make, for having the other day so lavishly shot forth your lightening, that its force so instantaneously could strike Florello, one of
the

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the most worthy friends my little levy has to boast? some satisfaction I demand, nor shall less than half a dozen visits, made me in a shorter time than you have favoured me with one, excuse you, and in case of non-compliance, witchcraft at least, I shall pronounce against you; for Mackbeth's whole train could not have shewn a stronger influence. But you already have justly suffered for it, in losing that afternoon a conversation, such as but few men I ever knew, excepting him, are capable of furnishing; for you can form no proper judgment of him, I assure you, since he was not himself that day you saw him. He left us truly, quickly after you was gone, nor have we seen him since, though we expected him, but he had sense enough however left him just to ask your name, and where you lived, before he went away, that he perhaps might entertain his slumbers by repeating it.

Almira after smiling at this rallery, and answering it as well as she was able, (though honest consciousness appeared through sweet confusion) desired to
know

know his name likewise, in order to be even with him as she said, for such a curiosity.—To which Amanda replied as follows.

His father (Mr. Bellmore) is, my dear, our neighbour in Hertfordshire; a very worthy man, with whom we have been acquainted twenty years. The estate which he possesses, is reckoned worth a hundred thousand pounds; besides large sums of money in the public funds. He has a wife, indeed, poor man, of a less happy turn of temper than himself, subject to spleen and pride, and quite impatient of the least controul; (though such as always is influenced both by reason and good manners, from him whom human and religious laws have made her master) but generally she is to other people much more condescending. They have no children living, out of many, but Florello, who is just returned from his travels; he is, I think, now in the twenty-fourth year of his age, and is, indeed, an excellent young man! but when he is to stand on his preferment,
you

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you must not be admitted into the company.

Almira blushed, and looked a little-filly, and chose to alter their discourse to various subjects.

Cleone made a proposition for a walk that evening in the Park ; which, they agreeing to, Amanda's coach conveyed them quickly thither ; they living in the neighbourhood of St. James's.

Crudelia was abroad that afternoon, tho' she would often, by choice, avoid making one of the party among Almira's visitors, unless there was a gentleman amongst them whom she imagined there was reason to be fearful and careful of.

The evening was serenely pleasing ; and the walks were filled with what is called the best of company. They purposed walking round ; and only took the crowded walk, as in their way to pass through ; for Almira said, she thought the common method of re-treading in an hour one path so often, looked absurd and

and vain, by tacitly declaring to the beholders, that they themselves believed they could not be observed too frequently; tho' she had yet seen but a few, she added, who, in her opinion, were deserving any notice.

Well then, replied Amanda, I will shew you one more at least, this moment: see! there are five in company; three ladies, and two gentlemen: now, I shall leave it to yourself to find out which of the five I mean.

Just then Cleone tapp'd Almira on the arm; and, whispering, asked her, if she knew that beau in brown and silver? but she had then no time to answer her, excepting, (with a crimson'd blush) that it was Florello, by reason he was just then come up to them. He too discovered that he was not insensible whom he approached; and bowed respectfully, confused, in passing by them.

Well, cried Amanda, now I find he is not yet recovered; for I have never, till this moment, met him any where
(the

(the church alone sometimes excepted) but he would stop and speak to me.

He was in company with ladies, madam, (returned Almira) and might, perhaps, be engaged too deeply in some discourse, to break the thread of it abruptly; and, in such a case, you should excuse him. Nay, replied Amanda, if you pardon him, my dear, I fancy it will prove sufficient. And, in that moment, who should join company with them but him they were then talking of, to prove how necessary it is to speak with caution in all public places.

He asked Amanda's pardon for having been obliged to pass so rudely by her just before; adding, that as his fault in that he could assure her was attended with sufficient momentary punishment, he hoped she would forgive him.

This speech being so a-propos to what they had been saying, overspread each cheek with some confusion, they all imagining that he had over-heard them; and,

and, therefore, the more intimate Amanda answered him, that she really thought, and had been saying, it stood in need of some apology, unless the lady, she had once heard him speak of, was in his company when he passed by them.

Madam, replied Florello, I am at a loss to answer you. What lady can you mean? for I can recollect no one. I would not leave with pleasure inexpressible to join this company. Who that has any skill in painting would not choose to contemplate on the most finished pieces! Here are too many sign-post sort of beauties, forgive my simile, hung out to attract beholders, at the expence of shame and modesty! I must confess, since my return to England, I seem dropped into a new world; and every place, that used to give me pleasure, presents me now so often with objects of disgust, that I could even envy old Diogenes, but that his tub's dimension must exclude this company. Modesty, once esteemed the great characteristic of your lovely sex, is almost generally banished now; and the effeminacy so natural

tural and amiable in yours, regenerated into ours.

Amanda own'd, that what he said (she thought) was just ; and said it brought to her remembrance some favourite lines she had read ; which, as none there could take offence at, she would repeat them. They were as follow :

*Oh, woman ! woman ! woman ! think like man,
But look and speak, and move, with native sense,
Of power derived from sweetness. Once our crime
Was tempting man too strongly. Now 'tis ours
To abdicate old power, to tempt at all,
And shame desire from beauty. Light as air,
And emptier than the void, we flutter through ;
Flirting fantastic on, from scorn to scorn,
We straddle o'er, and burst all bounds of love.
O ! be absolv'd, ye sultans of the East !
If there your prophet saw the sex so lost,
Well might he scruple to allow us soul !*

Florello expressed himself much pleased with them ;—Almira and Cleone smiled on each other, knowing the author of them. He begged to know it likewise ;
but,

but being told that secrecy had been enjoined, was satisfied to gain the promise only of a copy of them, but added, that he thought the person need not wish to be unknown, since none could be offended at such just and general satyr, whom any human creature of good sense, would wish to please at all.

Almira told him, she believed he would not choose himself to read them to those ladies he had just then left, especially if one of them was her, who caused him so much pain one day, from her resemblance only being seen, since lovers, she had heard, was always fearful of offending, but that he, no doubt, was ablest to inform them if that was true; and added, that she had indeed so much of womanish impertinence and curiosity, that she wished to see that lady, if she was really in the park.

His eyes immediately besought the ground, as if to find an answer, when recollecting his invented story at Amanda's, which was in truth no more than an apology for his confusion on seeing

Almira there ; he raised them on her, brightening through a lover's languor, and replied as follows.

When, madam, I have next the honour of seeing you, I shall perhaps be able to oblige myself in shewing her to you ; but could those ladies, amongst whom you thought she was just now, be sensible how high a compliment you have made them in that mistake, they would, in my opinion, have much more reason to be proud of their accomplishments, than have many of our most celebrated beauties ; but I will venture to assure you, it would wound me greatly, if you, madam, whose judgment none who know you, I am persuaded, can doubt the strength of, should condemn my admiration of her ; as for these ladies, I will hope I may be safe in their kind approbation of my choice, for she is too like one they both admire and love, for them to disapprove her.

That is, replied Amanda to Cleone, a compliment made to our friend, methinks somehow, which we both seem com-

compelled to join in, if not to pay for, and by their looks upon each other, they discovered plainly that they understood his meaning.

But Almira being silent, Florellin changed the subject, by desiring to know if she admired musick? saying that he knew Amanda did, and he should think himself the most obliged, by their acceptance of some tickets for a concert, which he had taken for the benefit of an unhappy gentleman whose great benevolence of heart to others, had been the only cause of his misfortunes.

That is a cause, returned Almira, that demands aid of every powerful friend to virtue, and she begged she might have six of them, having the money ready for them in her hand. Amanda made the same request, but he declared, with a polite confusion, that unless he might be honoured by their condescending to accept of them, he should be angry with himself for having named it, and doubly so, as it must

prove the means of his offending, by a disobedience not to be avoided.

Amanda then, in order to decide it, told him, he should give them all to her, which he having done, she added, that she would manage the account herself and balance it, perhaps, by soon inviting him to a concert of her own, an opposite indeed to his, for it would oblige one of the most happy families.

Had you not named an obligation, madam, Florello answered, I should have guessed that family would prove your own.

It is, returned Amanda, and the appearance of this company, on the commemoration of a day, from which that happiness was dated, will be held by my best half, and me, the kindest obligation ; I must not be denied by any one of you ; and I expect you all shall likewise take it as a particular distinction, as it has been our rule, to have no company upon our wedding day, but those we judged were happy like ourselves,
that

that envy might not come amongst us. But I should furnish room for laughing at us, were I to tell you how seldom ('till we added single people to our number) we have been able to make up a company sufficient for a country-dance ; tho' our acquaintance is, you know, extensive ; yet our intimates were but few.

This is, I own, a whim ; but may not private meetings be as whimsical as public ones ? No club, among you gentlemen, admits a member improperly initiated ; and who, that is wise at all, would wish unhappiness to be associated with true felicity ! An ugly, threatening omen, in the very sound, methinks, there seems, that should forbid it upon such occasions.

But, madam, (said Florello) give me leave to ask a question. How are the members of your society to be admitted ? Not upon oath, but judgment, I suppose ? since, if they are, I must decline, I frankly own, the honour of accepting your pleasing invitation.

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She (laughing) answered, No; that what she gathered from appearances was all she fixed her choice by; and that, indeed, might often too deceive, were truth compelled to be the speaker of their Society; but some allowances were made for the unmarried, since there is great difference between those who are not quite so happy as they would be, and others who are known to be really unhappy!

Then, madam, upon such allowances, (replied Florello) I can with joy attend you; and, moreover, promise this, (if the most pleasing prospect don't deceive me) that I will be that day happier than any other company on earth could make me! My friend, your worthy spouse, I make no doubt, will be, by then, returned out of the North; tho' now the day is near, for Thursday is, I think, the 20th.

It is, (replied Amanda), and, as you will see that very date upon these tickets, sir, you just now gave me, I need not doubt your pardon for returning them; tho' I shall insist upon it, that the poor
gen-

gentleman, there mentioned, may not be a looser, but a gainer by it. To-morrow I expect my dear Fidelio, as he has wrote me word he should reach home by Tuesday evening. But, added she, in spite of all my ostentatious boasting, as if I would be thought above a mortal's state, I will discover to you an unworthy weakness in my nature, from which alone my happiness has suffered hitherto,—it is the frequent contemplating on the melancholy certainty of being separated from it! and, notwithstanding reason and religion both condemn me for this want of fortitude, I unavoidably go on, and sin against conviction.

Thus, sir, you see a reason why all oaths must be by me excluded on this subject, and ought even in the most accomplished state on earth, to all appearance.—I was this morning reading a few lines which pleased and pained me much; and, as they are very a-propos to my discourse, I will repeat them to you. Their author is no stranger to this company; and I will, one day, let you read

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the poem ; but these four lines particularly, dwelt upon my memory.

*O ! why were friendship's concords wound
so high !
To sound the softest, sweetest, strongest notes,
When envious death must snap each tuneful
string,
And all the keys of harmony be mute !*

All present joining in the approbation of them, excepting Almira, she undesignedly discovered who was the author of them.

Just then an unexpected and unwelcome shower obliged them, with precipitation, to hasten to their coach ; and the much-concerned Florello, (after expressing politely his warm hopes, that he should be so happy to find again on Thursday, the satisfaction he was then too soon deprived of) stepped into his chair, which waited for him in the Stable-Yard.

Amanda set down Almira and Cleone at their own door, but would not be persuaded

swaded to a-light, for there was a visible alteration in her spirits, occasioned by the melancholy part of her discourse that evening. It greatly influenced her beauteous friend; and had not kind Cleone, now and then broke silence, in their driving home, they had appeared a silent meeting; but, at their parting, she forgot not to remind them of the expected visit on the Thursday following.

That night Crudelia and her son were both to sup abroad, (tho' not together) which left these female friends an opportunity agreeably of furnishing themselves with conversation; a favour they would gladly have dispensed with oftner; for, where we fear, the true felicity of love or friendship must be wanting! excepting only the pleasing fear, or care, of giving any pain to those we so esteem.

Almira asked Cleone, what she thought of this Florello, now she had heard, as well as seen him?

She answered, he appeared (she thought) as amiable in mind as person! if
he

he was not deceitful, like too many of his sex ; but he has given one instance of his judgment, added she, that calls for no suspicion, his preference of you to every other woman.

Fie, fie, Cleone, said Almira, suffer not thy kind partiality so much to prepossess thee. These travellers, in order to become agreeable, are often found to be thus lavish of their praises ; which, generally, are as light and transient, as the air thro' which they are conveyed : and, yet, how many melancholy proofs are daily given, of credulous poor girls being taken in those traps, thrown out to catch their folly !

That is very true, my dear, (replied the other) and probably it was one of those poor damsels gave birth to an old favourite song of mine ; which is so a-propos to what you have been saying, that I must sing it to you. The words were these :

Aurelia,

*Aurelia, pretty, fair and young,
Out of her window saw
A cage, to which some lime-twigs hung,
Unwary birds to draw.*

*A blackbird in the cage was put,
To act the tempter there ;
At last a sparrow, silly slut !
Came hopping on the snare.*

*Alas, poor bird ! Aurelia said,
Confinement is thy fate !
But little thought the harmless maid
That it would be her state :*

*'Till young Alexis, rich and fair,
Aurelia chanc'd to see ;
Who fill'd her untaught heart with care,
And so entrapp'd was she.*

Almira thanked Cleone for the song, and told her, she believed it was her own. But Cleone assured her it was not, and that she had been told it was wrote by a young lady, when she was eleven years old.

But, to resume our former subject, added she, since you have always suffered
me

me to use a sister's freedom with you, joined to the friend's, I would advise Almira to fortify her heart with all its native noble strength ! to stand the repeated force of this young gentleman's accomplishments. For, unprepared with necessary caution, many a general, as brave as you are, (whom I have read of) has been taken by surprize. While you remain thus innocently unalarmed, believe me, you are in danger.

But you must certainly be safe you think ;—his forces are detached to other quarters. But tell me, Do you in reality desire to see this lady ? or, would you not, at least, be as well pleased with the continuance of his agreeable account of her ? since, should she prove unworthy the comparison of being like you, methinks the affront would vex you ; and, if superior to you, in your opinion, (whose modest impartiality, I know, might own it, tho' no other person might allow it just) pray who would wish, or court occasion, for thinking meanly of their own perfections ?

But,

But, you will have this curiosity soon satisfied. He said, (you may remember) that he should be, next Thursday, more happy than all other companies on earth could make him; therefore, this all-excelling fair-one! will, I assure you, most certainly be there.

And dost thou really think she will, Cleone? (replied Almira) If I was sure of that, I would not go; for I, you know, never loved mix'd company; and she is quite a stranger to us all, (except indeed Florello) for even Amanda, whom she is to visit, did not seem to know her, when she was mentioned; besides, at present, I am not fond of cultivating new acquaintance: when I become more mistress of myself, than now, with any satisfaction, I can be; I may, perhaps, think otherwise. No, my Cleone, thou shalt go, I think, alone that evening, and carry an excuse for me: I shall be better satisfied with thy account of what has passed, than if I had myself been present.

And were it to be so, my friend, (replied Cleone, smiling) and should this much-feared

feared rival, or —— what is her name, appear? I know not whether friendship might not punish me, as much as love might probably another person I could name.—There is a bird, I have heard of, which (when it hides its head) imagines no one can see it; but, had that bird been blessed with reason! would not you, yourself, have wondered more at such a strange simplicity?

I think, (returned Almira) that no bird I ever heard of, could have a wilder note than thine at present. Friendship and love, and birds that hide their heads! Prithee, dear Cleone, speak intelligibly, that I may better know how I should answer thee.

That I will do, replied the other, when the reserved Almira is pleased to give her friend a better reason for desiring to avoid this visit. Do you remember these two lines? wrote by an author, I the most esteem. “The picture of love,” my dear, the poem is called.

All

*All that we speak, or look, or think, or
say,
Is above thought, and out of reason's
way.*

Then, cried Almira, thou hast certainly confessed thyself in love, Cleone.

No, no, (returned the other) but thou, without confessing it, art certainly in love, Almira; so it runs much better.

But were it so, indeed, Cleone, (since now I can a little plainer comprehend thy meaning) is it not prudent, if we see a dangerous quicksand, to keep clear of it, if possible? Should I allow your strange suggestion to be just, these lines (tho' not so good) may prove as applicable as yours, you just now quoted.

*If love attempts to court the virgin's eye,
O, let her, quickly, from the tempter fly!
But, should he once disturb her gentle rest,
Confine the prisoner close within her breast.
For buried lamps, they say, for ages lie;
But, when they are expos'd to sight, they die.*

Well,

Well, now, my innocently artful friend (replied Cleone), I find you then had only wisely fortified a heart you did not choose to own there was the least necessity for guarding; but, notwithstanding all precaution, this hero will, I see, at last be conqueror! and yet, as certainly, you will see this conqueror at your mercy, or I am much mistaken.

Just here, a hasty rap at the street-door surprized them into silence; and, presently, a servant brought up a letter left by a stranger, who (he said) had business with his lady Crudelia, and of great consequence.

The person hearing she was not at home, desired the letter might be taken care of, that she might have it the moment she returned.

Almira saw it was her cousin Flavillo's hand; upon which, Cleone was curious to discover the contents, if possible, saying, that from a quarter so diverting, they might find something to occasion laughter, and hardly should discover any
plot

plot of much importance. She, therefore, as it was made up negligently, and without a case, by turning it about, perceived that he was then in hands the most ungentle, on some affair of debt, being in a bailiff's house, where he desired immediately to see his mother.

Just after they had satisfied their curiosity, Crudelia came home, and in a gayer humour than they were often used to see her;—a kind preparative! for the unwelcome opposite she was to meet with; but which is too observable in the occurrences of human life, where joy and sorrow do as generally fore-run each other, as shadow does the substance.

She did not presently perceive the letter on the table; which, when she had found, and read, her much disordered features would have discovered, that some unpleasing business it contained, had they not already known it. But she seemed careful that they should not discern it; and, putting it into her pocket, presently withdrew; and, as they afterwards were told, ordered a hackney

coach to be called instantly ; and for that night they saw no more of her, as it was very late when she returned.

The morning following, they beheld the strangest alteration in her manner of behaviour. A conscious satisfaction, taking pains to hide itself from observation, then thoughtfulness and doubt, succeeded by a penetrating look of strong enquiry, would seem to fix her whole attention on Almira ; and, with a kinder voice than usual, she asked her, if she did not wonder where her cousin Flavillo was ?

Almira answered her, that she had certainly no right to be inquisitive concerning him.

At which, Cradellia laughed, and said, Well, but however, you will not be angry if I should tell you, I suppose ? He sent me word last night, how much against his inclination he was detained by an acquaintance, who obliged him to go out of town with him ; but he proposes to return to day, and he desired
me

me to present his best respects and love to you.

The air and purport of this counterfeited story, you may suppose, amazed them not a little ; nor could Almira, ever strenuous in her love of truth, tell how to answer her civilly ; and, therefore, breakfast being over, she rose in haste, and went to her apartment, without making any answer to it.

Crudelia, without ceremony to Cleone, (whom she both feared and hated) went out directly ; telling her servants, she should not come home till evening.

It will be proper here, to let the reader know, to what this change, so visible in her, was owing ; tho' it was long before Almira or Cleone could account for it.

When she went out the night before, in order to release her son from a large debt, for which his taylor had arrested him, (which sum she had given him long before to pay) he was no sooner cleared from that, than the same officer pre-

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sent him with such another billet, for a goldsmith's bill, amounting to a hundred pounds, for a gold watch, snuff-box, and a variety of womens trinkets.

This second shock, his mother was no way prepared for ; first, as she had not brought a sum sufficient with her, to discharge it ; and secondly, the use and nature of that debt she had not been acquainted with.

The son was likewise as unprepared himself for this ; and knew not what to say, for a considerable time ; at last, an evil genius, ever ready to assist its pupil, helped him out, and bade him form the following tale.

That since the rascal of a tradesman had, he said, through his impertinent impatience, obliged him to discover it before he intended it ; why, he must tell her, but he would soon be even with the scoundrel for it. Then taking her to the remotest part of the room, proceeded thus :

That

That all those baubles, were the presents he had made his cousin Mira ; but that such was her peculiar way of thinking, that though she privately had suffered him to make his addresses to her, she would not give him leave to make it known, not even to her, till she thought proper, and that he could not tell how soon he might be able to pronounce her his, those presents he had made her, having obliged her greatly ; but, added he, you must not, madam, for the world, take the least notice of it, for it would everlastingly offend her.

This story reconciled the partially weak-sighted mother, to the parting with her money, which, on the following day, she carried to him, but told him she thought indeed the watch was needless, Almira having a very handsome one before, that was her mother's. That was, he said, too large a size, and now not fashionable ; which answer satisfied, and she was thus, at the same time, both pleased and cheated. But the lovely inoffensive subject of this fraud, was to be

made too much a sufferer by it, though ignorant of all, for a considerable time.

Flavillo thought himself now under the necessity, in order to prevent his being detected by his mother, to alter his behaviour, when observed by her in talking to his cousin; and being never used to join respect with love, which last, he thought it was necessary for him to affect a little of, Almira often was provoked to reprimand him warmly, for the want of such respect, which anger, he prevailed on weak Crudelia to misconstrue, as a mark of her affection for him, which she was so desirous to have concealed. He gave a sample of this conduct, the very evening he was released, which both Almira, and Cleone, took at first to be occasioned by an excess of joy, mingled with wine, on being delivered from the unpleasing situation, which they knew he had been in. But finding the continuance of it daily, Almira soon began to grow very unhappy, and had been more so, but that she often recollected what he had discovered to her, that his affections were
before

before engaged. This, as he likewise well remembered, he was in great perplexity, at being obliged to hazard the disobliging her, for fear she should disclose that secret to his mother. And thus embarrassed by his own simplicity; he made a still more awkward figure. He had reason to be certain, he should never gain her approbation of his match in view, of which the following sheets give a more full account; his head not being formed to make a politician, he found himself embarked in an affair that might turn out his ruin, as Crudelia's passion, most predominant, was avarice. But it was now too late to remedy all that he wished unsaid; and he must now wade on through mire, with which he had himself surrounded, tho' nothing good, he feared, could be expected from it.

But we will leave him for the present, and attend Amanda's wedding day, which being come, Cleone so prevailed with her preponderating friend, that she consented to go with her, and, as Amanda told her, she indeed appeared her-

self the empress of a bridal day, tho' every bride cannot be justly complimented with the endowments and behaviour of Almira. Her dress was likewise suitable, being a new white sattin, just made up, as second mourning for her father. Her head-dress, therefore, was plain cypress only, on which that day, by way of compliment, she wore white ribbands, in the place of black ; and as her person was above the aid of ornaments, she looked as amiable as all the studied opposites of colours, assisted by the richest glittering of jewels, gold or silver, could have made her,

The company invited, were got there before Almira and Cleone. Amanda met them on their entering the room, with that distinguished ease and complaisance, which is peculiar to good breeding ; and Fidelio, her worthy spouse, addressed Almira to the following effect ; he told her, he had been premeditating some revenge, but since the fair defendant had appeared, he must expect no pardon from the company then present,
should

should he proceed to mention farther the accusation.

She begged to know the intended sufferer? It is enough to tell you, that the sufferers, madam, added he, would have included all who were here before you came, and my Amanda's heart mislead her to believe something unwished must certainly have happened; when you, who stood foremost in her wishes, could be the last in gratifying them, for all our little senate are assembled; but this, he told her in a whisper; though by the pleased appearances of all the company, they might not, perhaps, have been displeased to hear the preference given to Almira; for there was not a glance of envy seen that evening, to oppose the admiration visible in every countenance, towards that accomplished and deserving beauty, an instance very seldom met with even in the politest companies. This party was indeed not large, as it consisted only of the following ten; Amanda, and her spouse; Almira and Cleone; Florello, and a lovely youth of sixteen years of age, the only child Amanda
had

had been blessed with ; Mariane and her spouse ; Horatio just then married ; Lucretia, a young lady of good fortune, and uncommon understanding, which she was going to give unusual proof of, by rewarding in Valentio, wit and merit, though unaccompanied with that, which does too often weigh both down, that glittering dross, which many of the undeserving part of the world are made conspicuous by. He, her intended spouse, was likewise there, a gentleman of a distinguished family, but trifling estate ; and she was mistress of a fortune sufficient for them both, being an heiress at her own disposal.

As soon as tea was brought in, Florello knowing Amanda's taste agreed with his, insisted he might have the honour that generally is bestowed on servants, to make their waiting needless.

Almira now began to cast an eye of observation round, for the expected lady beforementioned, who was so much her likeness ; but thought she was a stranger to herself, or no one she saw there could be

be the person; however, she determined not to ask Amanda concerning her, tho' full of secret curiosity and expectation. Nor were there any, by whose behaviour she could be misled to think, she had discovered her, excepting Mariane, who being acquainted intimately with Florello, and having more of the free and fashionable deportment, than Almira had been used to, that inclined her to a particular examination of her, for some time; she was indeed agreeable, but nothing more, nor could she long remain in this suspense, before she found, by the reciprocal expression, my dear, that she was married. That, my dear, is often a kind intelligible word; and but for that, we might sometimes be at a loss for a long while, to find the conjugal alliance out, though these indeed, were quite a happy couple, or at least as happy as any can be truly said to be.

Horatio was rather of too reserved a disposition, which rendered him not the best qualified, either for making himself appear agreeable, or for supporting conversation eloquently. This made him,

him, after tea was over, propose the calling in the aid of cards : to which Amanda, with her usual frankness, (accompanied by a polite civility) replied, No, my good friend, I beg you to excuse me ; for I will not thank you for that proposition now : cards may, I own, sometimes be found useful auxiliaries to an assembly, where the parties are unable to support themselves without them ; but I have ever thought, it seemed to argue a consciousness of barren conversation, when they are suffered to engross society. And, therefore, you will now, I am sure, exclude them ; and allow likewise, that this my plea needs no apology ; (considering the company I here am favoured with) nor could I, at this time, forgive their robbery and interruption.

He smiled, and bowed ; asking her pardon, and the whole circle ; and owned, that all she said was just ; yet looked a little as tho' he wished it otherwise, for he was very fond of that diversion.

Most

Most of the company concurred in the same way of thinking with Amanda; and Florello added, that he thought there were some other reasons which would justify her due dislike of them. As first, the interested motive that is too generally annexed to playing at cards:—the sudden alterations made in the finest forms and tempers, which are otherwise not bad; which shall, (continued he) as I was once myself a much-surprized spectator of, in a few moments, from a run of bad success, transport a lady furiously to let her anger fall from her fingers on the ears and face of a young gentleman, who had indeed been impolite enough to beat her first, with his unfortunate good luck! that evening.

At this, Almira starting, cried, Can that be possible! And do you say, you saw it, sir? But, pray, what could that poor unhappy creature's education be?

Madam, (returned Florello) there, indeed, as you suspect, I find, lay the chief blame; and, it is to education often,
many

many are indebted for the unhappy wives, which this great city (and many others) could shew us numbers of. Nor is our sex less faulty, in my opinion; for there are, I am afraid, an equal number of bad husbands: only, that many vices being, by custom, as well as reason, deemed more excusable in men than women; foibles, in the one, are counted crimes; which are not taken notice of, or only smiled at, in the other. As in particular, inconstancy; though, for my part, I own sincerely, that, when married, both the man and woman ought to be equally, I think, under the same restrictions; such as wisdom, love, and virtue, always should approve of.

O, sir, cried Mariane, your discourse on marriage brings to my remembrance, that I have never shewn you, (tho' I promised it) those verses I was favoured with, wrote by a young lady to her new-married friend. They may be pleasing to this whole assembly; and there are some, besides yourself, I know, here present, who are admirers of poetry.

Then,

Then, taking them out of her pocket-book, she gave them to Florello ; who (being desir'd so to do) read them aloud. They were as follow :

O, my gentle friend, be blest !

'Tis a dear but daring trust :

She should happiest be, who's best,

Were but love and fortune just.

But, in marriage, maids must steer

On a dark, and doubtful sea ;

Where too often rocks are near,

When from danger all looks free.

Yet, if soul, and form, can charm !

Youth and wit, and honour join'd,

You, my friend, are safe from harm ;

Mistress of a grateful mind !

Love, from reason, borrows bliss ;

There, secure, your triumph reigns :

He, who knows what merit is,

Cannot wound your heart with pains.

All smiled on Mariane presently, believing they were wrote to her, she being but lately married ; but she assured Amanda, (when she asked her) that they were not ; for, if they had, she should
not

not have had sufficient vanity to bear herself to shew them, however proud she might have been of such a compliment.

They all expressed themselves pleased with the lines ; but in particular Lucretia, who likewise told them, she had met with them before ; and, as she was seldom known to be a favourer of rhyme, (her genius being more adapted to the graver studies) her admiration might be partial ; as the subject they were wrote upon affected her not disagreeably ; for she was then, herself, just going to enter into the matrimonial state, as was before observed.

I have been silently taking myself to task, my dear Amanda, said Fidelio, on those three words my friend Florello just now made use of,—wisdom, love, and virtue, in the married state ; and I am proud to find myself so equal to the examination, as to the last two of them : but, as to wisdom, I am only certain, that I set out with her in marriage ; but, whether I have lost her in
my

my journey, that thou canst best inform me. However, if I have, since my Amanda never wanted her, we could not be, I am convinced, without her.

And if, (replied Amanda,) to have for twenty years been governed by the rules of love and virtue! are not marks of wisdom on your side; pray, who would wish to change the happy folly? This may, indeed, be said of wisdom (singly), that it is not sufficient, always, to give happiness. We have had, you know, too many proofs of that, in those we have been acquainted with; where, from the one's being conscious of possessing those accomplishments of mind the other wanted; by the contempt, which that produced, both were too soon possessed of less content than many an humble cottager; and were, at length, bereft of all domestic comfort!

Madam, replied Horatio, I now intirely acquiesce with you, concerning cards; and am ashamed, when I reflect on my too thoughtless proposition. In conversation, such as you yourself

oblige us with, to listen is to edify : and we, new-married auditors, I think, should only sit, and silently applaud.

That may be very true, my dear, cried Mariane, in your opinion ; yet I must beg your pardon, for I cannot intirely agree to it ; at least, you know, a woman's privilege is speaking : a stander-by, sometimes likewise, you know, sees more than those who play,—they often do : therefore, why may we not be then allowed such privilege to speak, where to conceal our thoughts were inexcusable ; that is, observe, supposing them worth hearing. And you, I think, have listened now to such a good effect, that I could not have pardoned you, had you concealed the influence which truth and justice had upon you. The subject we are now upon, is a-propos. Now it was always my opinion, madam, (to Amanda) that there can be no medium in the marriage state. Take care, my dear, (then smiling on Horatio) that I may never change that way of thinking.

A batchelor

A batchelor has little right to plead in such a cause, where he can certainly have had no practice, (returned Valentio) but what that lady has been saying (looking on Mariane) serves as my plea; and it is with me a query, Whether the medium, madam, is not much rather to be wished for, than the extreme of happiness! which ought to terrify reflection; since that cannot be lasting. Mortality itself forbids it; and, when we are exalted to so high a pitch, how great must naturally be the apprehension of a fall, not possible to be again, on earth, recovered!

But is not this an odd confession of your sentiments (replied Fidelio) in your lady's presence? Nay, even before she is your lady too?

This caused a general smile; to which Valentio answered, he should esteem himself no better than a hypocrite, (a character he ever most detested) if he was capable of uttering any other sentiments than those his heart should dictate.

Lucretia replied, she should never have thought so favourably of him, but for that way of thinking. Nor could she pity those, of her own sex, who would be courted with hypocrisy and flattery ; when, with the lover, they should loose respect and tenderness. The basis to build happiness upon, is friendship certainly, not adoration. The punishment of such idolatrous devotion, too soon denotes the crime of so misplaced an adulation, to any mortal being ; and, where such shameful sacrifice is offered, the offerer is seldom worth receiving.

Madam, replied Amanda, these are sentiments as just (in my opinion) as, I am afraid, they are uncommon, in the present age. But, it were to be wished, that such could be imprinted on the memory of every single woman.

What a pity it was, that poor Dorinda was not guided by such a happy depth of penetration ! You have heard, no doubt, her melancholy story.

The

The other answering, she had not, Amanda thus related it :

Dorinda was a lady of distinguished beauty, sense, and fortune, and an only child to an indulgent mother, her father being dead. She was of an age susceptible of soft impressions, wanting several years of twenty, when her ill-fortune threw her into the way of one, whom she was soon, (too soon alas !) prevailed upon to receive as the most ardent lover ! and, consequently, she, too soon, became a lover too. His form, dress, equipage, were all most glaringly attracting ! and his fortune was represented greatly superior to the expectations of her own ; tho' he indeed pretended it was in another kingdom.—Her mother was equally consenting to their nuptials. Her wedding-cloaths were made, and day appointed : just before which, a lady, bathed in tears, desired to speak with poor Dorinda ; and, in a manner the most moving, laid this dreadful secret open ! which she had before (by him) been frightened and perswaded into keeping from her :

—That she had been for many years the wife of him who was to be soon Dorinda's husband; which she confirmed the truth of, by her produced certificate. —That she had living many children by him, and was obliged to struggle hard herself, in order to maintain them, he being not able:—And that the prospect of Dorinda's fortune was the motive of this base action! which he had promised her a part of for secrecy; but that her love for him, and hatred of so black an action, forced her to make this sad discovery; regardless of the consequences (as to herself) if she could save an injured stranger from such threatening sure destruction! and preserve her husband from so deep a guilt!

And melancholy were, indeed, the consequences which attended it, to that unhappy innocent! who, loving this immoral monster, almost to distraction, sickened thro' grief, in a few days, with a malignant fever, which relieved her soon from human baseness; but, a short time before her death, she gathered calmness suited to the state she was then in,

in, and left that fortune, as she chose, amongst her kindred, which had so fatally proved her undoing !

They all returned Amanda thanks, for her relation of this story, notwithstanding it had cost some of them tears, who had not been before acquainted with it ; among which number, Cleone seemed the most affected, nor could she raise her spirits all that evening ; which her kind friend Almira, soon perceiving, rallied her upon, and told her, she should believe she was related to, or else acquainted with, that lady, if she continued her concern much longer.

Cleone blamed herself for such an ill-timed weakness, and promised to drive it from her memory ; but, added, that she never was indeed so much affected with a story of a person she had never any knowledge of.

Fidelio then desired they might drop this melancholy history, by waiting on the music that attended them in the long gallery ; where they must all, he

said, oblige him with a dance ; as it was always his opinion, that the body's exercise was full as necessary as the mind's ; begging my own good serious lady's pardon, there, (pointing to his Amanda) who, to confirm her readiness to obey, gave him her hand to lead the way for all the rest to choose their partners. Next Mariane, very willingly, gave hers to her Horatio : Valentio claimed Lucretia's ; and Florello courted with his eyes, as well as with his hand and voice, the partner whom he most desired. The young Amintor was the only person left for Cleone : and thus they all proceeded to the gallery.

Their entertainment there, may better be imagined, than described ; it giving room for little conversation worth reciting ; tho' agreeable to those concerned.

After some hours fatigue of pleasure, they left off awhile, to give some rest both to themselves and the musicians, whom Amanda ordered to go down for some refreshment. Mean while she went likewise to give some necessary orders for
the

the entertainment preparing for their supper.

This gallery was handsomely adorned with pictures by the finest hands; which soon attracted every eye, then more at leisure to observe them.

Almira's whole attention, for some time, was taken up in contemplating and comparing the features of two celebrated beauties; insomuch, that not observing who it was that stood behind her, and thinking that it was Cleone, (most of the company being got to the other end of the gallery, examining another famous piece, she cried, Do but observe, Cleone, the difference of these rival beauties! How lovely is the look of modesty in one! compared with the too conscious air of the other! Is she not, think ye, (pointing to the first she spoke of) the sweetest form you ever saw? Forgive me, madam, (in a low voice, replied Florello) that I dare dissent from an opinion, such as yours, in any thing? but tho' I both must see and own, that modesty has certainly the most attract-
ing

ing charms ; yet, I have seen a more engaging form than that, in my opinion ; and then in much confusion, looking first round, to see if any one was near, he from his pocket took a box, sealed up in a paper ; and said, will you forgive me this presumption, dearest madam ? pressing it eagerly in her hand ; it is only to convince you, that I have in beauty, a better taste than you, in all things else, I own myself widely inferior to you.

Almira, who by this time was covered with no less confusion than Florello, from observing her mistake, and his reply, was, with a trembling hand, just going to open it, when he prevented her by whispering hastily, not here, for pity's sake, dear madam ; and the company just then approaching towards them, she conveyed it to her pocket unperceived, but could not hide so easily, the flutter it had put her spirits into, which was not increased a little, by the humorous speech Fidelio made, who coming up to her that moment, accosted her as follows. So, my fair friend !

One

*One would have thought the sun, as lively
as he looks to day,
Had wanted warmth, without a lover's aid,
To light up that carnation.*

It is well, good sir, returned Almira, there is a prologue to your speech, whose power has art in it to make the rest be pardoned, for even raillery is sacred, when the name of friendship is annexed to it.

And therefore, madam, added he, I have a right, I hope you will allow, to be obliged in any reasonable request I make you? There is a plot against you, I was in truth the author of it, but all here, are now made parties in it likewise; you are to prove, whether or no, this gallery deserves the famous character it bears, for crediting the voice in singing. And yonder comes my wife, to second me in this request, I am sure; which all there, joining in the desiring of, Almira was prevailed upon to sing the following song.

How

*How wretched is the youthful mind,
Who, to discretion's dictates' blind;
Will passions fiery course engage,
To win the follies of the age!
To hunt with rapture new desires,
Which even in o'ertaking fires.*

*No joy but such can hope to last,
As reason finds, and fixes fast:
As unallay'd and virtuous love,
May copy from the simple dove:
Who void of mortal's vice, or art,
On one bestows its little heart.*

*O virtue! what on earth can be,
So lovely as sweet constancy;
Where souls, by marriage bands are joined,
Which time improves, if thou art kind;
But where thou, virtue, wilt not bless,
The greatest state is wretchedness.*

All were unanimous in their applause, and admiration of Almira's voice, except Florello; who could find just then, no language sufficient to express his thoughts in, therefore conveyed them only in a sigh. And presently the bell informing them their supper waited, they forsook the gallery, and were partakers

takers of as elegant an entertainment, as could be furnished, by a taste so equal to it, as Amanda's. It was enlivened by the band of musick; who were seated at one end of a large room, wherein they supped, and played at every health proposed, till ordered to withdraw again, to give an hour's opportunity for conversation, and likewise, that they might again regale themselves with rest and feasting, till they were to attend this little ball again.

While they were variously amused with sweetmeats, wine, and cheerfulness, Horatio started the following health, such lasting happiness to all the unmarried, who were then present, when they changed their state, as was possessed by his two worthy friends, the master, and obliging mistress of the ceremony. As for myself, said he, I have not yet served my apprenticeship, and therefore cannot yet, you know, set up for an example, or a master.

They who set up too soon, replied Lucretia, are too often very soon made
bank-

bankrupts ; but I persuade myself you are above the danger, sir ; as well as those you have chosen for our patterns.

O, madam, cryed Fidelio, it is too bold, and even presumptuous for any of us, to believe ourselves above it, or while we feel, and think we really are so, we must, like prudent soldiers, stand always armed for unexpected danger, for various and undreamed of are the assaults which frequently destroy, or hazard the destroying domestick happiness. Two friends of mine, experienced some years since, how necessary it was to do so, and thence despised an accident, that otherwise might probably have made them wretched.

Aurelius and Cordelia, were a couple who had many years been known to be more blessed in matrimony, than most this age affords examples of ; happy enough to raise that ever ready fiend, fell envy, to endeavour ways and means, if possible, to ruin it. How to attempt it, was the only difficulty, for they were never happy, but in each others company.

'pany. A friend however, or rather such a counterfeited one, as often takes the sacred name of friendship, only to prophane it, laid this cruel scheme ; he influenced a wretched, low, and wicked woman, to pretend she had been deluded by this worthy man, (whose character was an established one, for virtue, and the abhorrence of such guilt, especially in wedlock) and that she should send home an infant, whom she called his own, to be maintained by him : and many vile and false illiterate letters, were sent to Aurelius, all to this effect.

There was that mutual harmony, and happy confidence, in both Aurelius and his spouse, concerning one another, that no one part of either's correspondence, ever was concealed from the other's sight. He had no sooner read the first of these most infamous epistles, than with a countenance prolifick, equally of innocence, and great astonishment, he gave it to his Cordelia. But what a blessed pre-eminence, has an established virtue ! for she knew him justly, and there was a sufficient proof of its superiority given,
in

in her manner of receiving it; since all such artifice, could but impress her mind with nothing more than due contempt, and detestation for the wretch, who had premeditated such an execrable villainy, against her good Aurelius; nor had it power to destroy one moment of that felicity, whose apparent brightness had drawn forth, so dark a cloud of an infernal kind of envy; for any other motive of peak, or malice, &c. could never be discovered. But in a short time after, a more successful enemy to earthly happiness, divided them effectually, and he was taken from all sense of suffering, through human baseness. Almira much applauded the happy fortitude of mind Cordelia shewed, on this occasion; adding, that she believed there were too many happy couples, who would be rendered otherwise in such a case, though it must argue small regard, she owned, or else a very mean opinion certainly of one another; when either a husband, or a wife, can be by others influenced to think the least indifferently, of an object so before approved, and dear, from an experienced merit.

To

To which Florello, with an air of gallantry, replied :

*Distrust is poor ; and a misplac'd suspicion
Invites and justifies the falsehood fear'd.*

So says the poet, whom my friend Fidelio just now quoted, madam, I well remember ; but though suspicion often I believe invites, or is the cause, it never can, in my opinion, justify in matrimony the smallest falsehood ; for, if I have a just idea of that sacred state, it is both emulative of a heavenly one, and should, as nearly as is possible for mortals, approach, and represent the likeness of it, in purity and truth ; but, I am afraid too many of us, set out quite wrong, while we are single ; and in our journey towards the married one, from false and glittering prospects, then around us, destroy our relish, for the too generally plain domestic mansion we are going to inhabit. For courtship is, in fact, with most, mere masquerade ; and wedlock, never fails to strip off soon, each parties masque, and many are with reason, shocked to see the ugly form a beauteous visage had before con-

cealed. Yet, this worst vizard of the mind, is of so thin a fabrick, that if dim-sightedness, was not too commonly a failing of the judgment, it might, I am certain, easily be seen through, and I am vain enough to think, I could myself discover it.

O no, sir, no ; you are indeed mistaken, returned Fidelio, that is not a task so easy as you imagine ; though I once thought the same myself, but was prodigiously deceived ; as for example, now, I own in my Amanda, I expected a good woman, or I would not have had her, but she has quite deceived me, and has proved beyond my expectations of a mortal !

The beginning and conclusion of this speech, had given a painter admirable room to exercise his genius, from the profusion and contrast of passions, visible in every countenance ; but love, and gratitude, would have been represented in the most just and amiable degree, in case the features of the most sensibly obliged Amanda, could have been truly taken ; she blushed, and bowed

bowed to him, with smiling consciousness of happy obligation; but joy, sometimes, cannot (like other torrents) overflow from fullness into speech, and she could make no answer therefore to it, but such as might be read through the most speaking eyes.

Horatio, looking upon his Mariane, with an air of tenderness, charged her, by her good friend's example, to continue to deceive him just in the same manner.

And now Florello grew impatient for another opportunity, of frequently approaching the fair hand, whose heart he wished to captivate, and therefore thought it long before the musick was returned, which he inadvertently discovered, by often looking towards the door, and hanging an enquiring ear that way; which the polite Fidelio observing, stepped out and hastened the return of. They danced out the remainder of the evening, with general satisfaction, and audible delight; for that diversion, when conducted with the

delicacy of good breeding, by a select assembly, polite as this was, is both agreeable and healthy, and is a beneficial relaxation to the mind, as sleep is to the body. But it is too frequently made use of, I allow, to purposes less innocent, and as one melancholy instance of the truth of that assertion, occurs this moment to my memory; it may not here be disagreeable to mention it, though foreign to my present story.

Lucinda was a young lady of small fortune; who, having lost her parents, lived with a near relation, and her two daughters. She visited with them; and was respected, as if she had been their sister, and lived with amity and satisfaction, for a considerable time.

One evening they were all invited to a ball, to which, as usual, they accompanied each other.

Lucinda was unhappily the mistress of an attracting form, I say unhappily; because, if that is not defended, by the strictest prudence, joined with virtue, it
must

must be looked upon as a misfortune only.

They had not long been there, before she was observed by a young gentleman, whose glittering dress, at least, bespoke him such, for he was quite a stranger to them, and he addressed her for his partner. She too readily accepted him, and she alone took up his whole attention all the evening; and he engaged so much of hers, that all her female friends, seeing themselves so much neglected, in comparison with her, and the hour growing very late, proposed to her their going home; but she much more agreeably amused, on one side, did not so readily incline to listen towards the other, till at the conclusion of another dance, which she was by him persuaded to join in. She found, in short, that her disgusted company had left her, and were gone away, nor was there, upon enquiry, any servant left to guard her, or provide a coach or chair. This put her spirits in the greatest agitation, fear and surprize could give them,

aided by no small resentment, against her female friends, we may suppose.

The night being far advanced, and as the weather was very bad, no chair, or coach, was to be got, though her assiduous partner, seemed to use his best endeavours, to procure one for her. He would not suffer her, by any means, to venture home alone, at such a time of night, therefore attended her himself.

But how redoubled was her vexation, and surprize, when she got there, to find, that no admission could be had, that all the family were gone to bed, or would not seem to hear her.

What could she do? she knew it was too late to visit any of her acquaintance, nor could she bear the thought of her appearance; draggled, and almost drowned with the rain, and dirt, having had many streets to walk through, she would have rested at the door till morning, but, that young Vainlove, used his ablest arguments, in order to persuade her from, by rousing
up

up her pride against a past indignity; that he, by soothing her natural vanity, might lull her apprehension into an incapacity of seeing thro' another, that was too soon intended for her.

In fine, with much intreaty, and a great number of professions, intimating the most sacred honour, in his pretensions, he prevailed with her at length to be conducted by him, to take shelter in his habitation, he having chambers not far off, in one of the inns of court; and there, too soon, alas! by oaths of love, and constancy, she was deprived of innocence, and rendered thence incapable, through conscious shame, of ever more returning to her relations; whom Vain-love missed no opportunity of representing, as unworthy of her, from their having been the cause, he said, of what she called her great misfortune, though his greatest happiness, would she be persuaded likewise to find hers in it. How long he thought it so, I have forgot, but from this dark blot, her character was ever after stained, and justly over-

spread with shame and infamy ! though it must be acknowledged, that if some latent sparks of native weakness, had not possessed her disposition, she would have been proof against intreaties, of so indelicate a nature as going home with him ; and resolutely would have persisted in her proposition of having her relation's threshold for her pillow, if none more eligible could have been thought of for her.

But to return to our much more agreeable assembly. Amanda's company broke up, before it was a proper hour to bid good morning to each other ; and we may believe, Almira did not choose to rest, till she had quieted her curiosity, concerning what Florello gave her in the gallery ; and when she had broke the seal that held it, she found it was a snuff-box made of gold, the shape of it a heart, adorned with diamonds, in the genteelest and richest manner ; but how astonished was she, when upon opening it, she found the lid contained her picture, drawn in the dress she wore at the play, that night Florello saw her first.

Within

Within the paper it was sealed, were wrote these lines :

*This, sweet enquirer ! only this can be,
The likeness, which idea gives of thee.
Yet think me not to lovelier beauties blind,
Reflection's abler pencil paints thy mind !
That lovely portrait ! soars above all art ;
But glows with heav'nly influence at my
heart.*

These, (when she had read them to herself) she bid Cleone read ; who exulted not a little to find she had, in love-discoveries, been a wiser penetrater than Almira ; and, turning round and round again the paper, in rolling up the snuff-box (when she had done admiring the beauty of its workmanship) she found, and read aloud, the following lines :

“ Think me not, dearest madam, an
“ intruder, too presumptuous, if I dare
“ wait on you ! since, from your ap-
“ probation of this my too-aspiring
“ choice, my happiness must hence ex-
“ pect its date.”

A soft

A soft surprize and paleness immediately appeared to over-spread Almira's features. Which, when her friend perceived, she feared some indisposition was the cause of it ; not knowing, but that she had seen those lines before, she gave them to her.

Alas ! said she, my dear Cleone, what thou hast been reading last, occasioned it. These only are the weak indispositions arising from my fears perhaps ; and yet there is a fluttering at my heart, which, as I never felt before, methinks should look like some unwished foreboding. This rigid aunt of mine will certainly affront him, if he comes here ; and I shall make a silly figure to be obliged to see it and permit it. Why does he wish to add more fetters to a shackled slave ! but he, indeed, is ignorant of my uneasy situation. What must I do, my friend, in order to prevent these threatening troubles ? I must, I think, some way put off this visit he intends me.

First

First ask, (returned Cleone) that more judicious counsellor that just now fluttered so ; and, if that seems to countenance this visit, let not the ugly bugbear of Crudelia's fordid mind, dissuade you from receiving it.—Compliability of disposition to oblige a friend, or a relation rather, I should call her, is certainly as amiable, as it is praise-worthy ! But, if we offer to it, so valuable a sacrifice as our own happiness ; it then becomes, I think, a weakness, even were the object much more worthy than Crudelia is ; nor can, in fact, a real friend desire it. But, if your grateful disposition, induced by his apparent merit, finds pity willing to repay, what he unblushing dares, I make no doubt, call love ; why should you fear asserting to her, nobly and openly, that free choice, which nature planted in you first, and a kind father taught to flourish into the attainment of your wishes.

I thank thee, my Cleone, replied Almira. All thy sentiments are just, and worthy of thee ; and I should be too undeserving of them, could I repay them
with

with deceit. Deceit is ever faulty : but to a friendship, candid as thine, I feel that it would be inexcusable. Why should I fear, indeed ! at least to thee, asserting all my thoughts. Yes, I confess, I pity him ; I hope it is no more than pity ! — But he, replied Cleone, interrupting her : I will relieve thy tender delicacy, that otherwise would have hesitated round about the truth, in uttering these few short words : but he appears deserving of my love ; — and so, indeed, I think him ; unless hypocrisy has power to conceal itself behind the appearance of all human virtue ! And now take care you are not jealous of me ; as you know I am not often lavish in the praise of men. But he, in my opinion, seems no less a truly good and worthy man, than finish'd gentleman.

No ; if I know thee, and myself, I think that were impossible, (returned Almira) thou couldst not give me any cause for jealousy, (tho' thou hast, I allow, accomplishments sufficient ;) but, if thou could'st, friendship would metamorphose

transform it, I am persuaded, into the tenderest love and pity for thee.

No ; my Almira, cried Cleone, I should merit only detestation from thee ; as I am sure I should detest myself, could I give room to any wish that clashed with thine : tho' often we may see the edge of poisonous jealousy divide for-ever female intimacies ; friendship's I will not call them, for such I hold more sacred, and above the reach of all such low and grovelling opponents.

It is, replied Almira, a reflection the most degrading on the noblest of our passions ! that one should be annexed, as if inseparable from it, that is so ignobly the reverse of it. It is likewise an affront to our own judgment, when we so easily suspect an object is unworthy, whom we have thought before quite perfect ; for, neither pity nor excuse is due to those, whose folly places their regard, where merit does not first invite and justify them.

All

All this sounds well, my dear, (returned Cleone, smiling) yet, as the saying runs, Much may be said on both sides; and fore-warned, fore-armed: therefore keep clear, I charge you, of this most dangerous precipice, that lies in courtship's journey! The wise, and good, keep clear of it in matrimony always.

Thus ended their discourse that night, it being late; and both alike desirous of rest; for pleasure generally leaves fatigue behind it. Yet, notwithstanding that, sleep was for many hours a stranger to Almira's eyes.—Florello held them open; but she possessed herself with the belief, that it was Crudelia only, whom she had reason to be fearful of.

It was but a short time before Florello came; impatient for the opportunity (that he was not so easily to have) of opening more his soul to her, whom he had, with his eyes, sufficiently acquainted of its sentiments. But, how shall I describe the interview! description must fall short; therefore, the reader's

reader's own judicious imagination must assist my insufficiency.

Crudelia, and her neice, were at their tea ; Cleone was gone out to visit a sick servant, who had formerly lived with Almira's father. Florello's name was ushered in before him, by an attending footman ; and she had hardly time to answer, " Desire him to walk up," before she saw him enter the room : nor had she power, or leisure, to satisfy the hasty and half-angry question of her aunt, " Who is he, neice ? I know of no such name ;" when he addressed them both with suitable respect ; but was unable to conceal, in all he look'd and said, the passion that accompanied it : while passions, of a very different nature, were working strongly on the features of Crudelia ; whose penetration seemed more intent to find Almira's sentiments concerning him, than to discover whether he was deserving of her neice or not ; for that, indeed, she thought, no person but her son could really be ; and, from his base delusion, she had for some time past been easy in her fears, but
the

the behaviour of Florello roused them all again ; as she had, by experience, skill enough in love-affairs, to see and know that he was not a lover so indifferent to Almira, as all before him were : and, by some hints she gave, it was plain, that she had not forgot her having seen him at the play.

However, she took care to give no room for more than general topics of discourse, by keeping fixed possession of her seat, till at the expiration of two hours ; when Florello, with a dejected air of disappointment took his leave ; but with slow-backening, and reluctant steps, which seemed confessing honestly, at every respectful bow,—I go 'tis true,—tho' most unwillingly ; — but leave my soul, and senses, all behind me !

And Almira, from conflicting passions, was, at his departure, not much less affected ; she, every moment, was expecting those sort of lectures, which her aunt had a peculiar talent for, and which she thought her features seemed prolific of :

But,

But, how agreeably was she surprized ! when she began as follows :

“ A very pretty gentleman, indeed ! but pray, how long, Almira, have you been acquainted with him ? ”

She told her, but a little time ; and that he was her friend Amanda's particular acquaintance ;—that she had seen him often there, and in the Park with her ;—and it was from that, he had claimed the privilege to visit her.

Crudelia's soul seemed at her eyes while this was speaking, eager for more discovery ; but artfully avoided letting her words betray suspicion. But they observed she was in private with her son, in deep discourse, for a considerable while that evening ; yet seemed quite amicably gay at supper : for, only at meal-times, they met ; Almira always hurrying to her apartment, as to a place of sanctuary : and she was never there at any loss for subjects of employment ; reading and writing ; needlework, and the diurnal that she always kept of every

Vol. I. I thing

thing which had occurred worth notice, filled up her hours, when unengaged by company ; and much, indeed, took off her relish for society in general ; where, as she used to say, the sweets attending it are seldom powerful enough to overcome the bitter. But, to proceed,—

In a short time Crudelia and Flavillo were obliged to take a journey down to her estate, to settle some repairs and leases, which just then required their being present ; and she used her best endeavours to induce Almira to go with them. But she desired earnestly to be excused ; alledging, that as it was so near the seat which was her father's, (that they must pass even by the door) she would, at least for some months longer, choose to avoid the shock which seeing it might give her spirits.

And now, Crudelia being gone, the coast was clear, for our impatient lover to hope a prosperous voyage in love ! He, at Amanda's house, soon heard, with joy, the news of their departure ; and, without loss of time, repeats his visit.

Almira

Almira was alone, and reading, when he came ; and, being intently taken up by a pathetic story, which she was then just entered on in Mrs. Rowe's *Friendship in Death*, she did not hear or mind the servant's opening of the door, or shutting it ; nor knew that any body was near her, till she saw Florello bow before her ; and, as she was attempting hastily to rise (with visible confusion), he, on one knee, prevented her ; and, with the utmost eloquence of eyes and attitude besought forgiveness, for the ardour of his lips upon her ravished hand. Then, for a few moments, bowing down his head, profoundly silent over it, he raised and fixed his sparkling and expressive eyes on hers ; and would have made his opening lips relieve the overflowing fullness of his heart ; but trembling timidity possessed the seat of utterance, till shame relieved him by a manly tear of love and joy ! suppressed by apprehension of offending ; which he would fain have hid, but could not ; and therefore, in a confusion much more amiable to see, than easy to relate, he rose politely, and for a moment turned aside, to summon up

sufficient courage to pronounce the following sentence : (at least to this effect, for words are seldom justly literal, when conveyed by the remembrance of a person so concerned and circumstanced as it may be imagined Almira was just then).

“ Forgive me, dearest madam, if excess of rapture, from thus attaining the long-wished-for blessing of paying my respects to you alone, has carried me beyond those bounds, which my due adoration of your too powerful virtues ought to set me ! Those virtues, madam, which my daring hope aspires to merit ! if the most elevated sense of their superior force, can ever make a mortal merit them. You are, I am certain, my dearest earthly angel ! And you must have been, from the first happy hour in which I saw you, acquainted with my passion ;— that passion, which, on approaching your dear hand, a moment past, almost consumed my reason.—May I have leave to nourish this bold infant-hope ! Or, do you not, alas ! forbid me, as a wretch unworthy of such transcendent happiness !

Almira

Almira, here, only bowed gracefully, remaining for some moments silent; and then desired him to sit down,—making an effort to get up and reach a chair: but he, with a polite and interested haste, prevented her, by choosing one that stood the nearest to her. He, when seated, turned towards her in a sort of profile posture, amiably attentive! as if each atom of his frame was turning into ear, in expectation of her answer.

“ Believe me, sir, (returned Almira) I am far from thinking you unworthy, of one much more deserving, than the maid pretends to be, whom your too partial praises have just now so highly rated! And I had always the greatest detestation for that too common (and, I think, dishonest affectation, and ungenerous) method of proceeding, too frequently made use of by my sex; who think, that female modesty forbids them to declare the smallest sensibility of merit in the other, tho’ their judgment sees it ever so conspicuous.”

“O ! (cried Florello) snatching eagerly again her hand, and pressing it with ardour to his bending lips, suffer me thus to seal, and thus,—and thus, my everlasting gratitude ! and tenderest acknowledgments ! for such unpresidented excellence of goodness ! To be approved by thee ! is more than man can merit. Yet my ambitious heart will not, alas ! be satisfied with approbation only. But let it be, henceforward, my delightful task, by copying thy resplendent virtues ! to exalt it into a nobler and softer name, love ! only love ! was formed and meant, my angel ! to be an adequate return for love.”

Here, blushes over-spread Almira's cheeks ; her eloquence was now all silent ; yet she attempted gently to withdraw the hand, which both Florello's held ; as if those words, he uttered last, had hurt it. And he, (being incapable of wounding such apparent delicacy) with looks of amorous contrition, proceeded thus : “ But, now, at least, just now, I will compound for pardon. Only say but you pardon me ! ”

To

To which she answered, (with a smile of gentle dignity) I do; if you are but as sure there is, in your opinion, occasion for your asking it, as I am fearful you again may stand in need of having it. And there can be no small hope of amendment, where the party is insensible of any fault committed.

Just then, Amanda; with Cleone, breaking in upon them, put an end to a discourse, which notwithstanding left its tell-tale influence, on both their features, to occasion a visible discovering conscious smile from both those friends; whose presence kindly aided them with general topicks of conversation; which, without them, would certainly much longer have continued agreeably particular.

And now, Florello, having so prosperously set out, proceeded for some time in the pursuit of his amour uninterrupted, and as happy as a lover in that situation ever can be said to be; for courtship, in its most tranquil state, bears the similitude of all our earthly

I 4 blessings!

blessings ! where forerunning wishes, eagerly pursuing distant happiness, treads down and overlooks all those which we already are in possession of ; nor ever can make the accomplished prize fully repay our expectation, for the pain, anxiety, and trouble it has cost us.

Almira's heart, and reason, received him as a lover, and a beloved, and now Crudelia's presence, who was soon expected to return, was dreaded by both ; Almira having let Florello know, how disagreeable a situation, from her unhappy temper, she was then in. But he was under the most painful apprehensions, from what Cleone, one day, without Almira's leave, informed him of, concerning Flavillo's being intended for Almira. And he endeavoured to demonstrate to her, how improbable it was, that she, Crudelia, could long be ignorant of that, whereon his future bliss so much depended, and it was as certain, she would take all proper measures in her power, to frustrate it, if possible. He hinted to her, that there was only one expedient, could with certainty, must

most happily prevent her schemes, for rendering them both perhaps unhappy ; his being lawfully the blest protector of those charms, whose influence, by all the laws of reason, love, and nature, took up the whole attention of his soul already.

But this, the nice punctilio in Almira's way of thinking, could not the least give into ; for, though her judgment, and her love, had chose him as their lord, she would not more than nominally call him hers, within so short a knowledge of him as a few months ; nor would she let the glare of bridal ornaments, extinguish the remaining mourning which she felt, sincerely, as well as wore, for an indulgent parent.

What should she therefore do ? her open heart disdained hypocrisy ; and weighing every reasonable circumstance, concerning her free choice, permitted by her father's will ; what had she cause to fear ? alas ! no more than a bad woman's rage of disappointment, in a favorite view, of sordid interest ; too often
found,

found, indeed, a powerful opponent against virtuous innocence, and gentleness of disposition, such as Almira's was; however, that she was determined to prepare her mind to meet with patience. And then she entertained a milder expectation of her, from the recollection of the favourable manner, in which she spoke to her, concerning Florello, though she had seen so little of him, and thought her good opinion, must undoubtedly increase, from having a greater knowledge of his worthiness. All this, determined her, in a short time after her aunt returned, to think of opening the affair with frankness to her, but as the sequel will discover an accident, unthought of, soon prevented it.

One day, Florello, willing not to loose one of those precious hours, which he could now enjoy uninterrupted, while Crudelia was from home, had made his visit to Almira earlier than usual, and was to stay and dine with her.

Crude-

Crudelia, being now grown quite impatient to return to town, though many things were still unfinished, which required her attendance longer in the country; Flavillo influenced her, to let him wait their finishing, which she consented to, and leaving for his use the coach and servants, which went with them, took a place in the stage coach, from thence to London; and choosing then to walk it home, left all those bundles, which she brought up with her, at the inn, till she should send for them.

When she approached her door, she found it most obligingly left open, as if on purpose for her coming; but this was owing in reality to negligence, not duty, for none in town were made acquainted with the time she intended to set out.

Suspicion always makes the greatest use, if not the best, of eyes, and ears; she, unobserved by any of the family, crept softly up the stairs, and stopping at the dining-room door, could plainly hear Florello's voice, for he just then, unfortu-

unfortunately had resumed the former subject, and with great earnestness, and voice more raised than usual, was urging ardently, Almira, in the following manner.

For heaven's sake ! my dearest creature, if you allow me to believe my happiness, or misery, is not intirely indifferent to you, persist not in your too dangerous resolution, of revealing to your designing aunt, your generous prepossession in my favour. No, let me rather, painful as it is to think of it, be deprived at present, of the sight of all my eyes can see with pleasure, or at least as frequently as I could wish to see you, till those few months expire, which are the only bar to my felicity, when I may hope with rapture inexpressible, to call you mine.

In hearing this, Crudelia heard enough, but was prevented in her satisfying any further her curiosity, by footsteps founding from the upper stairs, which were Cleone's, who was just then coming down, having been up to dress
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as usual, against dinner; she therefore, hastily and softly stepped into her own apartment, which lay across the entry, and opening a closet that she always kept the key of, concealed herself for a considerable time; but watched her opportunity, when dinner was served up, to step out unperceived; and entering the room they were in, quite spoiled the relish of their meal, by her unwished appearance.

They all imagined she was but that minute come to town, and general consternation spread itself around their little table, for it contained only the lovers, and Cleone: however, she put on a carriage the most artful and amazing, and it was difficult to know, whether she was the most obliging to Florello, or to her niece: nor did Cleone seem overlooked by her as usual.

This made Almira's unsuspecting heart rebound with joy, and smiles of grateful satisfaction light every feature, that but just before had slackened at her presence. But yet a thoughtful gloom
seemed

seemed to sit heavier from it soon upon Florello's brow, which much amazed Almira. But her aunt obliged her, by the many little stories she had gathered in the country, to lend her chief attention for some hours to her alone; and poor Florello, quite unable to collect his dissipated spirits, from the sudden sight of one whom he so much disliked and feared, thought it adviseable to take his leave, soon after tea was over.—Cruelia would have fain perswaded him to make a longer stay, but he observing that she studiously avoided leaving them alone one moment, was determined to refuse such invitation, and alledged, as his excuse, that he had received a letter, which he must answer by that evening's post, and it would require all the time he had then left.

Joy seemed however, to shew itself apparently, from this his answer, with more sincerity than it perhaps had done, if he had staid for some time longer; and she, with much more complaisance than was expected from her, made an apology for being too much fatigued,
her-

herself, to wait on him down stairs, and therefore made a motion that Almira should. Cleone having left the room some time before.

This overstrained civility, amazed Almira! but she, without reply, or much unwillingness you may suppose, obeyed her; and immediately returned, meeting her aunt, who was with seeming difficulty, from the effect the jumbling of the stage coach had left upon her limbs, going into her chamber to seek an hour's rest, she said, in order to refresh her spirits.

Almira would have waited on her thither, but she repulsed her civilly, and desired her only to call her maid to cover her; adding, go Mira into the library, for such they called the dining-room, there being a case of books fixed at one side of it; and find some entertaining book to read to me, when I return; for this was a request she sometimes made, when in her kindest humour.—She, with much readiness, inclined to oblige her aunt in that request;

as

as reading was, indeed, the most agreeable employment to Almira. She went directly to the abovenamed case, whose close inhabitants, had it not been for her familiar hand, and likewise Cleone's, might have long rested undisturbed. There, the first book she fixed her choice upon, was, the Night Thoughts, by doctor Young, which she remembered happened to open, where these lines first met her eyes, in Night the 1st. p. 11.

How dim our eyes !

*The present moment terminates our fight ;
Clouds, thick as those on doom's-day, drown
the next, &c.*

The melancholy justness of this thought, so much affected her ; that, letting down the hand, which held the book ; she in a pensive contemplating posture, had fixed her eyes upon the floor ; from whence, as she was just recovering them ; she saw a paper lie, close by the place Florello had been sitting in. A nameless fluttering and sinking seized on her heart immediately, as she perceived it was dropt by him, it lying just
beneath

beneath his chair, which she had been obliged to move before she could unlock and open the case of books, but had not then observed it. She opened it with great precipitation, finding it was a letter, though the direction was torn off, and seemed to be a woman's hand, if any hand at all, for it was wrote in characters the most unusual, and the contents were found to be as follows.

“ Think not, thou most beloved of mortals ! that it is within the power of time, or distance, to efface the precious influence you have fixed upon my heart, nor can I speak enough my joy, at finding by your last, that you are still, and will for ever be, as your dear words obligingly express it, the same angelick lover I have ever found you. And to convince me of it, miss not, I charge you, any opportunity of writing to me, till you bless again the longing eyes of her, who neither will, or can be other, than eternally Florello's.”

This was scarce read, before it inadvertently dropt from her trembling
Vol. I. K hand,

hand, upon the ground ; nor could she any longer have prevented her relaxing nerves, from following it, had not Cleone just that moment, fortunately came in to her assistance, who running to her in the utmost fright, for she appeared both pale and lifeless, desired to know the cause of such disorder ? but she soon too plainly saw, that poor Almira had not breath enough to answer her. She, having with some difficulty got her to the nearest chair, endeavoured with some reviving salts she had at hand, to bring her to herself ; which, in a short time, she effected, and in the tenderest manner, cried, my dearest friend ! what can have happened ? where is Florello, and your aunt ? I left you well, and all together.—At his name, she started, as if just awake ; and looking on Cleone with looks of mixed distraction, and beseeching pity : replied, there, don't you see him ? pointing her eyes and hands towards the ground.

The frantick air, and purport of this answer, so much amazed and shocked Cleone ; that she at first regarded not the
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the letter, till the first eye Almira lent it, guided her to take it up, but just as she was going to read it, another fainting fit seemed threatening her sweet friend, and therefore, she imagined it most proper to postpone a little, her impatient curiosity, and in some minutes after, led her to her own apartment.—There soon a shower of friendly tears relieved the almost bursting heart, when recollection, ever upon such occasions, an unwelcome visitor, and shame, at finding she had even to Cleone, discovered so much weakness, made her almost relapse again : however, soon she gathered strength enough of speech, to ask her for the letter, but Cleone begged she might have leave to read it first, for yet she said, she knew not the contents, though certain, that they must be of very disagreeable importance, as now she plainly saw it had occasioned her disorder.

No no, pray give it me, (returned Almira earnestly) if thou art really now a stranger to its contents, I beg thou wouldst not wish to know them, since

thy foolish friend must pay so dearly for it, in forfeiting thy kind opinion of her ; I would not have thee, even lessen thy too favourable way of thinking of my fortitude of mind, though I, alas ! have lessened my opinion of myself forever ! yet, be it as it will, methinks I should hide nothing from a friend like thee, and I will let thee read it, there thou wilt see in those dark lines, the clearest proof of the perfidiousness of man's base nature ; I ever was averse to letting my untrusty heart be open to that syren love ; and he has now, alas ! indeed, let in a traitor.

Cleone read the letter to herself, and afterwards remained dumb, and astonished, for some moments. And when astonishment gave way to utterance, she only cried, with elevated voice and eyes, can it be possible ? where found you this vile scrole ? this fragment of a letter ? for there is neither name, I see, or superscription.

Almira answered, that it lay close by the chair he sat on ; adding, nor am I
any

any longer at a loss for the occasion of that too visible uneasiness that clouded his behaviour often, but most this afternoon ; nor, what that letter was, which caused him to depart so soon to answer it. And now, I recollect a strange confusion, no doubt, from conscious guilt, when he said that. I wish thou hadst been in the room, Cleone, when he went away, to have observed him, as I did.

Alas, my dear, returned the other, you seem to have too strong a proof already of unexpected infidelity ! and yet (tho' I abhor letting partiality mislead my reason) there is a kind of callous unbelief in me concerning this, which I cannot account for, or excuse, that sins against conviction : If there was not his name, I could not be persuaded it was wrote to him.

No more, my friend, replied Almira, in an angry tone of voice ; no more of that, I charge thee ; nor, from this hour, let me, I intreat thee, be offended by the sound of his unworthy name ; I will, if possible, forget it.—This was, I

make no doubt, the object I have had the honour so much to resemble. But why such mean recanting from the Truth? I had, at first, no right to blame him for such prepossession in another's favour; and, that I have now, let me for ever blame my foolish sensibility, that could (Cleone) so misguide me into an approbation of him.

Yet, will you not (reply'd Cleone) hear what he has the power to say, when you shall shew him this? No criminal, however guilty, ought, methinks, to be condemned without a trial: Appearances, too frequently, deceive the wisest of us mortals.

Alas! I find they do (return'd Almira) but there is proof, I think, that needs no hearing. Had there not been his name (as you observed just now) I own I must myself have doubted; notwithstanding it was plainly he who dropt this paper; and there is neither date, or title to it. But, that very name, and the contents considered, should I now condescend to see, or hear him, weakness

ness in me would ever after justify his falsehood! No, from this day farewell, ill-known Florello! And farewell folly, in the shape of treacherous and foolish love. For now, my dearest friend, I will not scruple to declare the honest truth to thee, that I sincerely loved him! and with a flame too pure, and worthily inspired, I thought to be this way extinguished ever.

Thus poor Almira's overburthened heart endeavoured to relieve its anguish (nobly scorning base disguise) but his impression was too deeply there engraved, to be with ease erased. A fixed and silent melancholy, from that moment, threw its fetters on her mind and spirits; nor could she be prevailed on, by either conversation, or any other amusement, to attempt removing them: She for some days confined herself intirely to her chamber, and Cleone's company: Nor did Crudelia often, disagreeably, attempt the breaking in upon her said retirement; a guilty consciousness, no doubt, restraining her, which will be presently explained. But we will leave

them for some time, while the still more distressed Florello calls for our attention. He, upon recollection of Crudelia's very great civility, (tho' not entirely satisfied concerning such a sudden change) determined soon to pay another visit there; as his whole soul seemed lifeless (as he used to say) out of Almira's company. How much more lifeless then, must it have been, on finding there was no admission for him at Crudelia's house: again, and several times again, he called; and was informed Almira was gone out: 'till turning up his eyes one day, as he approached the door, they met with hers, who in a moment disappeared. — And finding the same answer given him below, as usual, and that Cleone likewise always was denied to him, he gave himself intirely up to the most exquisite despair!

Amanda was gone out of town, to whom he would have flown for some relief, from this new wreck of dread, and horrible uncertainty! Nor could he think of any method, by which he could convey a letter to her; the servants
would,

would, he found, refuse to give one, by their behaviour to him; nor would he venture, for his own peace of mind, to hazard hers, in case it should be carried to Crudelia's hands: for nothing more, could his imagination furnish, as the cause of this new treatment of him, but her commands, enforced with rigour, that Almira should not see him.

Nor will it be improper here to inform the reader, in justice to Florello's character, that he was innocent, as well as ignorant, of the letter before-mentioned; and of too strict, and worthy veracity of heart, to harbour double love. That vile affair, the subtle art of base Crudelia had invented; who, having wrote it in her closet, during that time she had concealed herself (at her return to town) took the opportunity of disposing it, to answer her black purpose, just when Florello went away! And thence proceeded her alteration of behaviour, and requesting that her niece that day would wait on him down stairs.

For

For wickedness is often too fruitful of invention, whilst virtuous, unsuspecting innocence, conscious of no deceit within, looks not enough without, to find it.

However, 'twas not many days before this wicked woman (while she was secretly, no doubt, exulting, with self-given applause, at finding she was likely to succeed to her best wish, by breaking off a love affair that seemed to strike at all her views) was visited, by that all-seeing justice, that penetrates the closest secret of the human heart, by the most violent indisposition, which first seized on the use of all her limbs; leaving her mind, for some time, unaffected; as the properest instrument of punishment, thro' sensibility! But that, from the continuance of tormenting pain, in a short time gave way; and she appeared (at least to those who were not well acquainted with her baseness) an object, worthy of the greatest care and pity.

Almira's heart, that generally used to err (as some would think) in favour of
huma-

humanity, and christian charity, could hardly all this while forgive herself, for an increased disgust she felt, nor could account for, against her aunt, that in a manner, as it were, withheld her from approaching her bedside, whenever she requested it. This, she attributed to the dejection of her own spirits, which could relish at that time, no conversation but Cleone's. (And how invaluable indeed, is such a friend! on whom we may, with safety, rest the burthen of our bosoms in affliction.) And then the frequent agonies of horror! and seeming desperation! which, at that time, possessed Crudelia, so much surprized and shocked her tender nature, that happening, when she by a superior trouble, was ill prepared to bear it; greatly threatened the overthrowing her own health. This made Cleone press her, in the strongest manner, to quit the house immediately; and try if change of air and place, could re-establish her. And this, Almira, with some Pleasure, listened to: But said, she thought it would not be consistent with humanity, to leave her aunt (if not a kind and tender

der one) in so deplorable a state ! tho' such as she might, notwithstanding, labour under for a considerable time.

But, while they were pre-ponderating upon this subject, a servant brought Almira up the following letter.

“YOU will, I know, my dearest female friend ! excuse me, that I did not take my leave of you, before I left the town, when you are told my dear Fidelio's health required such haste; and that this happy air of Hertfordshire has quite recovered him.

“ But you must now farther forgive me.—I am about to chide you. What has befallen *our* good friend ? You might perhaps be very angry if I had put a *Y*, to *our* ; tho' it is the only title now, his hope is proud of, I can assure you.

“ You will, by this time, know, I mean Florello. He has intreated me, some days ago, to send you the inclosed; (one of my servants being to go to London) having no other certain means,
he

he said, of getting it conveyed, with safety, to your hand. Whatever the contents may be, you are the properest judge of them; I am a stranger to them; but yet can give too shrewd a guess, that it is some frown of yours, instead of smiles, has been the occasion of it; from one unhappy, unwished circumstance, that only mine can tell you.

“ He is, since this came to my hands, fallen into so very dangerous a disorder, both of mind and body, that hardly any hope is given of his recovery. Your name, is all he can be heard to utter, day and night; tho’ no one person in his family (for he is at his father’s) seems to have been made acquainted with it before; and they are almost distracted to discover who Almira is; and what has so unusually affected him. But I have hitherto avoided giving the satisfaction, I am scarce able to keep from them, of hearing I am acquainted with you; I would not say of hearing we were friends, for my own credit’s sake; as worthy friendship can admit of no such reserve, methinks;—
remem-

remember that, my dear. And you have been, indeed, too close in this affair ; and yet, you see, you are detected. But, if you value my forgiveness or advice, let me, I earnestly intreat you, within three days at farthest, see you here ! For, I assure you, in case of non-compliance, even my Fidelio will, he says, believe that women are all grown deceivers, since the age we married in.

“ And now, you see, it is the honour of your sex, thus put to stake in you, demands this visit, to my dear Almira’s

Impatiently expecting friend,

And most obedient servant,

AMANDA.

P.S. I will expect no answer, (therefore have given orders that none shall be waited for) but that most wished, of seeing you.”

Almira

Almira, after having read this letter, gave it to Cleone, but with trembling fingers and features, truly sensible of the contents : and, while she was reading it, broke open that from Florello, which had been inclosed. It was as follows :

“ Most charming and ador’d Almira !

WHAT have I suffered ! What can I have done ? Certain I am, that I must have offended ; but how, alas ! is dark uncertainty.

“ How did your ever - charming image, at the window, in one wretched moment, bless and blast me ! Too horrid inconsistency ! And yet my tortured heart, wreck’d equally by doubt, despair, and love ! from thence, to this unhappy hour, approves it just. Yes, that same rending heart, alas ! can even, in suffering, acknowledge, that you are, you must be just ; — and yet refuses to inform me, wherein I have deserved a treatment that, otherwise, you never could have brought your gentle soul
to

to give, the once most happy ! but now wretchedest of mortals ! who will, however, while he can say he lives at all, subscribe himself, as he must ever be,

Unalterably yours,

FLORELLO."

Cleone, having read Amanda's letter, returned it to Almira, with a smile of thoughtful melancholy ; and asked her, Whether she thought it would be now the most consistent with humanity, to leave Crudelia ? or to see Amanda ?—I dare not say, Florello, added she, tho' pity might advise it.

I will determine how to answer that, (replied the almost - spiritless Almira) when I have had your thoughts on this ; (giving her Florello's letter).

Cleone having well perused it, cried, Excuse me, my dear friend ! nor ask my farther thoughts. The seeming strength of truth and tenderness which this contains, I own, enervates me to weak-

weakness; nor would I bias wrong; a confidence and judgment like Almira's.

I blame not your compassion, my Cleone, (returned Almira) 'tis laudible as 'tis disinterested,—it therefore may be trusted. I should, I own, have doubted the integrity and worth of mine. But, tho' appearances and reason join to clash with it, I will, if possible, force truth alone to be the arbitrator; and, by that noblest of decisions, will henceforth determine.

I have a thought, this moment crossing my imagination, that perhaps may prove propitious to my view. It is, you will think, a very odd one; and will much, I know, offend the nice punctillio of the over-delicate. But Florello's present case makes such apologies unnecessary to be thought of now; nor should I take the step I am intending, were not his life (as I am informed) in danger.

Do you, my dear, give out, thro' all this family, that you have prevailed on me to visit honest Prue for a few days;

—and there, this evening, I mean to go. But mind, no coach or servant (of our own) must attend us thither.

This person was a favourite servant, who had lived many years in her father's family, and waited on Almira; whose health permitting her no longer to continue in that way of livelihood, had settled on the borders of the town (not far from them) in a small branch of business, but depending chiefly upon the letting her lodgings ready-furnished. And thither, in a few hours, Almira and Cleone went.

Nor was it needful to acquaint Cru- delia with their departure; her senses being then too much affected, for her to have understood whatever had been said to her.

They took a hackney coach, which carried a portmantua with them; and they contrived to make it almost dark before they alighted at her house.

Now,

Now, this good woman, (fortunately for them) at this time was free from any lodgers, and had only in the house a daughter of her own, who lived with her, and assisted her in the business.

Prudence no sooner saw them enter her small parlour, than (with tears of joy and wonder) she ran to kiss Almira, crying, with uplifted hands, What can have brought my dear young lady to my cottage, at this time of night? How do you do? How have you done since I had last the honour of seeing you?

Almira soon acquainted her with all; and shewed her plainly, that the disorder her mind was in, occasioned this late visit. And she opened more fully to Cleone, than she had before, (and her new confidants) what she had been resolving on. Which was, to have two suits of mens apparel got immediately; one for Cleone, and the other for herself; in order to set out, next day, to make the requested visit to Amanda. And Charlotte, the good woman's daughter, being about the age and sta-

ture of Almira, was to go and purchase them at a sale-shop, with all things besides that might be necessary for them. Almira instructed her to say, she was to buy them for a present to her (supposed) two brothers in the country ;—one of them somewhat shorter than herself ; the other her own size exactly. Her's was to be a suit of fine black cloth ; Cleone's likewise fine blue grey.

But, (at the first declaring her intention) she intreated Cleone not to accompany her in this romantic expedition, if it was disagreeable to her : since Charlotte seemed very desirous of waiting on her upon this occasion ; and of putting on again, a dress she seemed to think became her better than her own. But Cleone would not suffer any person to attend her but herself.

And thus, by next day's noon, all things were ready for their journey : and, as the house stood near no other, they were free from the impertinence of observation. But honest Prudence sent forth many a careful sigh of apprehensive

five fear, concerning this strange metamorphosis ! mingled with prayers and earnest intreaties, that she might hear from them ! to be assured of their arriving safe, she said, thro' their new expedition.

Almira promised her she should ; and left her a direction, to inclose a letter for her to Amanda, if any message or enquiry should be made, or sent, from home concerning her.

This done, and both thus every way equipped, to look like gentlemen, they hired a post-chaise ; and, by the following afternoon, got to Amanda's seat.

The young Bellmont (for that was now to be Almira's name) had wrote a line or two, in order to prevent her friend's surprize, or their discovery ; and this, a servant of Amanda's carried in, before they would a-light. The note contained as follows :

“ My dear Amanda must not be surprized, if she, beneath the borrowed
 L 3 names

names of Bellmont and Alexis, should find the real ones, Cleone and Almira.

“ I have, I hope, obeyed you,—only to support the honour of my sex, thus put to stake, you say, in me. I have, for once, laid the appearance of my sex aside, and taken up the other. But let no eye, nor ear, be witness of it, but your own. And, therefore, let your garden be our place for conversation ;—there let us be desired to wait your coming.

“ Disguise, in all respects, must sure be guilty ! else, why this shame and pain attending it ?

Yours,

ALMIRA.”

This, when Amanda had read, they were accordingly conducted, by a servant, to the garden, where she immediately attended them, and led them to a summer-house ; where, unperceived by any of the family, they might discourse with freedom. And there Almira presently unbosomed her intention in taking
up

up that dress, which had, at first, amaz'd Amanda greatly.

I will, (said she) my friend, with your kind aid, and this disguise, endeavour to accomplish more than ever my own habit could do for me. I am, you see, by what I have hinted to you, in the pursuit of truth; and where is now the maid she does not choose (especially in love) to fly from? I have not time at present (or inclination you will forgive me) further to explain myself. Let it suffice, that I will see Florello; but you must introduce me to him, or properly prepare the way for me. — I would appear to be nearly allied to you, a student in philosophy or physic; or else divinity! (that I should first, indeed, have named) or all, if found of use on this occasion.

But you must, likewise, recommend us to a house, where we may lodge unnoticed; nor press me farther, I intreat you, to continue now in yours;—some word may probably escape us, and discover us at once.

Amanda having giving her a more particular account of the unhappy state Florello was then in, tears unavoidably stole down young Bellmont's unmann'd cheeks ; which made the former willing to change the subject for the present. She then proposed to them a place, just by her house, where they might lodge with privacy and safety. It was a little cottage, on a river's bank, that ran two fields beyond Fidelio's garden, which he had given to his shepherd and his wife, who generally were abroad all day. And there she could, without restraint or notice, go frequently herself, and send whatever might be necessary for them by her servants.

It was proposed, likewise, by that good lady, that they should pass for brother-students, but just come from college ; but of a disposition much more solid (added she) than is often met with ; as preferring study and retirement to all other pleasures.

Almira then desired Amanda to send a servant to discharge their chaise ; and,
after

after thanking her for all her offered favours, intreated that she would conduct them to their intended retreat immediately; which she obligingly consented to.

They found the honest, ancient mistress of it, sitting, without her door, employed in spinning. Amanda told her, she had brought two of her kinsmen, for some little time, to lodge with her; and charged her to take care of them, for she should often call, and would herself reward her diligence.

Pastora shewed them into her best apartment, consisting of two little rooms; where every thing as much excelled in neatness, as palaces excell in splendor. And there, in a short time, Amanda left them; giving directly orders to her housekeeper (who was intrusted) to carry thither such refreshments as were proper for them.

Amanda then, as was agreed upon, set out, with her Fidelio, to see Florello; consulting with him, as she went, (and open-

opening the affair to him) how they should act in this, to answer best their wish concerning his recovery ?

Fidelio apprehended danger from such delay, as this disguise portended : and Amanda knew too well Almira's delicacy, to propose a thought that might offend it. The strictest secrecy had been enjoined ; nor could she, on one side of friendship, make a wound, in order to heal the other.

They a-lighted soon at Bellmore's house. Bellona met them in the hall ; with both despair and grief, too visible upon her features, for them to have a doubt concerning the condition of her son : but Bellmore first informed them, that he grew every hour worse, tho' he had the assistance of the ablest physicians far and near ; who all declared, it was not in the power of their skill to help him, as his malady lay far beyond the reach of medicine !

Some affliction (they said) had touched his mind ; and, by the observations they

they had made, it certainly was love ; but it had gone too far, they feared, for him to overcome it ; having not only preyed upon his breast, but almost overthrown his senses : adding, that they had often pressed him to discover, to some friend, what was the cause of this ; but he seemed quite regardless of whatever had been said to him,—still talking to, and answering himself, tho' generally unintelligibly.

What can be further done ? (continued Bellmore). Think for me, I beseech you, my good friends ! that I may save my dear, dear boy ! tho' my whole fortune were to be the recompence.

Amanda eagerly embraced that opportunity, and told them, if they would choose to trust their son in the safe hands of one, who looked indeed like a too young practitioner, she would engage to answer for the consequences : for he had greater skill in such disorders (tho' they were deemed most difficult to cure) than many other members of the faculty,

faculty, much older than he was, could ever pretend to. — But, that he never would be called in consultation ; and was generally very shy of speech, excepting to his patients, whom he always talked with much ; depending upon discourse, more than medicines, often, in these sort of cases ; having long studied natural philosophy ; which, sometimes, greatly helped him to effect a cure.

This promising account of him, made the sunk eyes of Bellmore brighten thro' their cloud of grief, with joyful hope ! prompt gratitude, and every amiable sensation, (suitable to the occasion) that could effect the heart of a fond parent ! and, jumping from his seat, involuntarily, as if to make more haste in fetching him, he cried, But where, for pity's sake, my worthy friend, where does he live ? Where shall I find him ? What is his name ? I will send away, this moment, for him. Some guardian angel may, perhaps, have sent you to restore my dear Florello to me.

Amanda

Amanda undertook to send him speedily, adding, that she would talk with him before he came, concerning what had been already done. And hearing that Florello, by the help of a composing draught, had fallen into a doze, they did not see him, but thought proper to desire, their having been there, might not be named before him ; nor, that this young physician was recommended by them, for some days at least, for reasons, which she would one day or other acquaint them with.

Bellona answered, that such caution was unnecessary, as he neither seemed to know, or care for, any person now ; nor had she truly any hope from trying more advice, since he could, for some time past, hardly be persuaded to swallow any thing. But that, while there was life, there should be hope indeed ; therefore she joined with Bellmore to request, he might be sent as soon as possible.

Amanda

Amanda and her spouse then took their leave; she hastened to our young physician, before she slept, in order to prepare him for his visit; requesting, that her chariot might attend him. But Bellmont fearing much, with reason, from the known curiosity of servants, when they meet; chose rather, as it was but a small and pleasant walk, to take no person but Alexis with him, and to go on foot (tho' not unconscious that the ablest head, in practising of physic, seems to want weight, unless it is supported by the dignity of coach and servants.) Nor would he go till the next day, having heard he was in bed, and under the effect of opium; and it was besides too late. But on the following morning, having first properly disguised his face, as much as was thought necessary, by darkening its complexion, and eyebrows; and putting on a perriwig that shaded half the cheek, they both set out for Bellmore's. But Alexis judged it most proper, that he should wait Bellmont's return at a small distance from the house; alledging, that the pre-
sence

sence of a third person might frustrate her design in talking with him. Nor could her going alone make any breach in prudence, when his deplorable condition was considered, as she had once herself acknowledged.

The imagined doctor was received with the sincerest welcome, when he told them, Amanda had requested him to wait upon them; and he desired to be conducted to the sick gentleman's apartment.

Bellona would herself attend him thither, but Bellmore's grief kept him below. Florello was just taken up, and sitting in an easy chair, his back turn'd towards the door they enter'd at; and so intent on something he was looking at (which they at first believed to be a book) that, for some moments, he seemed ignorant that any one was near him.

Bellmont however, moving very slowly round to his chair, made a short halt, and sent a penetrating eye before him,

to

to observe what book it was. But how agreeably was he astonished, to perceive Almira's picture, looking full on the original.

Now, had our physician need of all the skill he was come there to exercise upon another: he was obliged to summon all the fortitude, indeed, of manly resolution, to conduct him safe thro' this adventurous undertaking, where there was no retreating handsomely.

Bellona having told her son, that she had brought a gentleman to see him, who was persuaded he could minister relief, if he would patiently be guided by him; he shut the picture up with great precipitation, as if afraid they were intending to take it from him, and turned his head averted from them, and declined it on his chair, returning not a word of answer. She then gave way for Bellmont to approach him; who, having found it most convenient to appear just then a quaker, kept his hat upon his head; and, with a pulse no less disturbed himself, attempted to examine
 poor

poor Florello's ; and knowing, in a moment, more of it, and his distemper, than many of his brethren, could in two or three, with a decisive nod and shake of head, he told his mother (turning first away from him) that physic would be here of very little service he perceived ; that 'twas the mind, alone, stood much in need of alterative evacuations ; and such assistance, as he believed, had not yet been thought of, or attempted, in his case, by those whom they had before consulted.

Bellona told him, in a whisper, that if he thought that only necessary, there was a very worthy clergyman, their minister, whom she would get to talk with him immediately.

No, by no means, at present, I intreat you, madam ; trust him intirely to my care ; I am not quite a novice in that science neither. Then turning round, and taking, very solemnly, again Florello's hand, he spoke to him with a more elevated voice, the following words.

Young gentleman, be comforted; fortune, I hope, has sent me into Hertfordshire, to establish your recovery soon, if 'tis not your own fault.

Bellmont had no sooner spoke this, than up Florello started, forward from his chair's back, like one awakened out of a trance; and looking wishfully and wildly round him, as if for somebody he could not find, sunk back again, and sighing, recomposed himself.

Bellmont observing this, and fearing lest Bellona should be alarmed at it, desired to be left alone with him a little while: and when she had left the room, having drawn a chair close to him, he began to bathe his temples with some reviving scents, prepared on purpose, to appear somewhat in character, and then addressed him thus: How do you find your head, sir, is it any better since I bathed it? Again Florello started, and looked up, as he did just before, and fixing stedfastly his eyes upon him, cried, in an earnest manner, Was it you, sir, who spoke to me?

Bellmont

Bellmont replied, it was.—He then again looked as if lost in thought, and sighed; looked wildly up, and cried, I see, alas! I was mistaken; eyes, and ears, conspire only to deceive me, like Almira! Then looking up again, on Belmont, for some moments, with his eyes overflowing, as it were, with mingled grief and languor, he begg'd to know his name and business with him.

He replied, My name is Belmont, sir; my function was intended to be only physic, but, prompted by a natural and more extensive curiosity, I have dived as deeply into several other useful sciences; nor could one so agreeable, as natural philosophy, escape my application. Your malady was lately mention'd to me (for I have not been long away from the college I belong to) and I was bold enough to think, it was within the power of my art to help you.

Believe me, sir, (faintly return'd Florello, seeming more compos'd a little) my affliction lies beyond all art, nature

M 2

will

will here not yeild to its poor slave !
yet I will own, you seem to me to be
the ablest proficient in your science that
has yet been brought to me.

Bellmont at that look'd down, and
blushing, bow'd, and thanked him for
his favourable prepossession, which he
hoped (he said) would turn to his own
advantage, by facilitating greatly his re-
covery.

Florello thus proceeded. There is a
kind of soft persuasive balm diffused thro'
all you say to me, that forces me to lend
attention to you, tho' too unhappily
convinced, that 'tis not in the power of
man to give relief to maladies like mine !

Perhaps, sir, (cry'd Bellmont) your
conscience (I pray excuse me) may, be-
ing over nice in some light love affair or
other, touch you too sensibly ; if so,
concealment will but help your ruin.
Deal plainly with me, I intreat you, sir ;
let me first probe a wound I come to
cure ; love is, I plainly see, your case.
—I have at present one beneath my care,
whose

whose story, if you'll give me leave, I will acquaint you with, in order to divert your thoughts from contemplating too intensely on your own grief; but you'll allow me to conceal his name. Sometimes much comfort can be drawn from only the comparifon of woes. (Here Bellmont ftopt, and prefently Florello raifed his head, and begg'd him to go on.)

This gentleman is young, and of an honourable Family, accomplished by an extenfive education, agreeably polite, and of a form adapted to engage the female approbation. Some time ago, he made his addreffes to a young gentlewoman, not much beneath him; who was weak enough to think, and hope, that ſhe had influence fufficient to engage his whole regard. But, juſt when he had urged from her ſo high a declaration in his favour, that they were ſhortly after to be married, a former miſtreſs proved her prior claim to him; which having reached the ear of her, whoſe ſoul, it ſeems, could brook no rival in her love, ſhe never after would receive

his false addresses. Yet, notwithstanding this divided inclination, it has so much affected him, that like the simple ass, the fable mentions, between these two, he seems to threaten being very soon deprived of both (or that both shall be deprived of him) for he has taken it so much to heart, that there has been but little hope of his recovery for some time past. And give me leave to say, that your disorder, sir, and his, in my opinion, seems to spring from the same sort of cause, tho' some circumstances, I allow, may differ much. Come, place your confidence in me, and trust me you shall shortly own yourself the better for it; while you conceal this enemy in silence, it preys upon your spirits, and must baffle all attempts to help you. I have an art, you are not yet acquainted with, by which I mean to serve you, if you can confide in me.

Florello seemed to listen, during this discourse, with melancholy pleasure and attention; mingled with, now and then, a heavy sigh! looking on Bellmont frequently, as if it was not disagreeable to him

him to give attention to this story : which, being ended, he reached out his hand to him, and shaking his, in the most friendly manner, (while an involuntary tear or two, stood trembling over his sight, as if ashamed to fall) he faintly answered him as follows :

I thank you, sir, for your kind care of an unhappy man, whose welfare merits not at all (much less from you, who are so much a stranger to him) such tender pains to save him. Nor does he wish for life, (to own the truth to you) unless that bliss of mind could be restored, on which the body's health alone depends. But, if it were in art to comfort me, you certainly, I should believe, was sent, by some kind angel, to effect my cure. For, while you talk to me, methinks, I feel my soul revive, as tho' it bid me hope again. Nor have I seen a person, till you came, whom I could force myself to open my disorder to ; yet I will own it all to you ; for, either I deceive myself, or there is a friendship, in your soul, as well as in

your countenance, that justifies my confidence.

Your penetration has been just, concerning me. Love is, I own, the cause of all I suffer;—a love! at once the purest, yet most hopeless! But, alas! sir, your other patient's case differs, indeed, widely from mine. I should imagine, I deserved not even pity, did not (as you conjectured) the circumstances of our stories greatly differ: nor can I well conceive, how one so false, as he appears to be, could be so much affected.—No; I am more unhappy, sir! I have long adored a lady, every way the most accomplished to inspire the tenderest passion. Reason, or self-partiality, allowed me to believe, that I was not the least in her esteem; and we were soon to

have been united by the solemn tie of matrimony. I thought myself the happiest of mortals! yet, from this blissful prospect, I was sunk down at once!—re-
peatedly denied the sight of her, in whom I lived! nor feared to conceive wherein I had offended her; tho' certain that I must some way or other.

Believe

Believe me, sir, I have no wish for life, unless to live for her. Excuse my weakness, if you think it such. She is deserving of it. And my want of merit, not my want of just esteem and love, must certainly have lost her.

Here, grief and weakness, almost overpowered him for a few moments; when he thus resumed his subject :

—Nor wonder I am thus affected, when I tell you, that she is not only mistress of every amiable attraction ! but that she is the first of women, who could ever influence my soul, to make me know it was susceptible of love, among the many I have seen in different nations and at home; where several, thought the most agreeable by others, have been proposed to me.

The touching manner this was spoke in, almost overthrew poor Bellmont's fortitude; and, inadvertently, called up so much the tender passions to the eyes and features, that Florello started ! as he

he cast his eyes that moment towards him ; and, gazing for some time upon him, with a kind of penetrating eagerness, he asked him, if he had not a sister ? for, either the delusion of a strong idea, (ever foremost in his mind) danced then before his sight, or he perceived a likeness the most dear to him !

Bellmont, tho' half confounded by this question, resumed immediately the man again, as much as possible ; and found it very lucky for him, that no stronger light (than was admitted thro' one shutter) had been allowed to enter at the windows of his chamber ; and answered him as follows :

No, sir ! indeed, I never was so happy ; at least, I never knew a sister. But I conclude, by what you said, in case I had one living, your disturbed imagination was perswading you, she was this favoured lady, just now mentioned. However, I am proud, I will assure you, that you have found so good a reason for me to expect, and hope, a place in
your

your regard ; tho' I must only thank the unknown lady for it.

Florello then sighed deeply ! and replied, Excuse me, sir ; my dear Almira, I remember now, often lamented that she had not a sister.

Well, sir, (resumed our young physician) I will now insist, you give me a small instance of your favour, by calling for a dish of chocolate ; for nature stands in need of more substantial sustenance, than the etherial one that (I am inform'd) you let her be supported by. And, if you will promise me to take, as frequently as shall be required, those requisite refreshments, which I mean to order for you,—they shall not be unpleasant I assure you. And, likewise, if it lies any other way, within my power, to be of service to you, (in this unhappy case you have let me into) you may command me freely ; and depend upon my honour, and the faithfulest endeavours, to restore your health, and happiness of mind again.

Flo-

Florello thanked him in the kindest manner; and consented, first, to his request concerning the chocolate, provided he would bear him company, and take a dish himself; which (the bell being rang for) he drank, with greater relish than, he declared, he had for any thing since the beginning of his indisposition. He then began again, to this effect :

I will accept your friendly offer, sir, of farther service : it is in your power to oblige me greatly, (for I have made none of my family acquainted with this story). And would you, therefore, wait upon a neighbouring lady, (for whom I have a great esteem) in my name, and only beg to know, if she has yet received an answer to a letter, wrote by me, some time ago ? it would, good sir, for ever lay me under the highest obligation to you. Should you be fortunate enough to hear she has, and it should be propitious to my ardent wish ! you need prescribe no other cordial to me. If not,—and then a sigh prevented him from saying more.

Bellmont

Bellmont assured him, that he would go immediately; and, having taken his directions (as if necessary) to Amanda's house, took the most friendly leave of him; and gave an inoffensive verbal recipe below, more nourishing than medicinal, which he desired Bellona to prepare for him; and see him take, as often as directed. But he refused the fee she urged him to accept.

Florello seemed to part with him with much reluctance; and enjoined him in a promise to repeat his visit on the following day, if possible.

He hastened to his friend Alexis; (who waited with impatience his return, in an appointed field, just by) and cried, Alas! my friend! I am almost convinced already that I have wronged Florello, even in opposition to my reason still.

The other, (when the above-mentioned particulars were told) replied, I am persuaded that your reason, very soon,
will

will be obliged to ask your own, and poor Florello's pardon. But they then made all the haste imaginable home to meet Amanda, who had promised to be there expecting them.

And she (with her son) was waiting at their cottage : for it had been agreed on that they should intrust that innocent and amiable youth, with their disguise, to give less cause for wonder, when that lady visited two gentlemen so frequently, tho' they were called her kinsmen.

Bellmont related to her all that had past. And thus that wise and charitable friend (after hearing it with fixt attention) replied,

Indeed, my dear, you have, I think, in this affair, been cruel ! and too rash, in passing sentence on him. Falsehood will, very often, nicely counterfeit the truth, in order to deceive.—But noble, self-sufficient truth ! disdains to wear the other's odious masque ; and, therefore, easily is known from the other. Florello must, I am sure, be innocent !
how-

however that vile scrole, that most unhappy circumstance, came to appear against him. Let me, I intreat you, go to him ; with leave, from you, to seal his pardon : tho', for ought I know, the pardoner of him, may, by and by, stand more in need of his ; or I will own myself mistaken greatly.

Alexis cried, I heartily concur in this opinion.

But the ponderating judgment of poor Bellmont, between hope and fear, hung timorously doubtful still : for there is, generally, planted in our nature, an unhappy aptitude, that labours to torment us ;—that makes us most incline to think those things are true, which most we wish should not : and she determined to be still more fully satisfied ; alledging, as her reason, that all doubt of constancy, must be entirely dissipated in her scheme of happiness.

She, therefore, would make a farther trial of him,—throwing off her disguise ; as she was sensible, she said, his sufferings for her were apparently sincere.

She

She then determined, that Alexis only should go, the morning following, and give Florello this note from Bellmont ; which, by Amanda's son, was first transcribed ; whose hand was quite unknown to him.

“ IF, sir, you find your health and spirits, will, to day, permit you to be conducted, in an easy airing, by the bearer of this note, to my abode, it will be of service to you ; and I hope to give you some account, not disagreeable, concerning my visit to the lady.

“ The air, and gentle exercise, I can assure you, will be of great effect to you ; nor will the journey be fatiguing, as the distance is a small one from your house.

“ You will soon know the reason of this unexpected, strange request ! and will, I am certain, then excuse the freedom of it, in

Your sincere well-wisher,

BELLMONT.”

Alexis

Alexis went next morning, and, after sending in this note, was soon desired to walk up, in order to attend Florello; who asked him very kindly after the health of Bellmont, hoping that no accident or sickness had prevented the visit he had that day intended him; adding, that he had found himself so wonderfully and beyond expectation mended, by his visit and advice, that he was able to think on the journey with much pleasure; and immediately desired the coach might be got ready for them.—But the request so much surprized his mother, that she insisted, for some time, that some of them might bear him company, for she was sure his head was now much more disordered than it was before. But he, declining that proposal, told her, he chose alone to talk with his new doctor, who had done more for him, by only talking, than all, before consulted, had been able to effect by many disagreeable prescriptions.

Upon which his father interposed, and begg'd her to desist; crying, I think he seems quite well already.

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N

Alexis,

Alexis, not disposed to see him dress himself (or rather be assisting in his dressing) desired to view the gardens, till he was ready ; where we will leave them to pursue their little journey.

Amanda and Almira (the last of whom was now no longer to be called Bellmont) were consulting how they might best receive Florello, if he should come ; and at last it was agreed between them, that the former only should appear at first. And she accordingly, alone received him, and told him not to be surprized, for she was kindly sent for thither, by his new physician, to partake the pleasure of his amendment, and the favour of that visit ; as there was something to discover, that would give him pleasure likewise. Nor could the doctor have (she said) the satisfaction of attending him, having been called another way, but just before he came, on very urgent business.

Florello seemed much confused at this, but begg'd immediately to be inform'd, if there was any letter for him from
Almira.

Almira. To which Aminda answered, there was one indeed, and of importance ! that should be shewn to him, if he would arm himself with necessary fortitude before he read it, smiling at the same time she said it, with a look of hope and comfort towards him.

On hearing this he sigh'd, and silently looked round ; seemingly with impatience, as if wishing for the sight of Belmont, and fearing to request the letter ; when the door opening, from the other room, presented his Almira entering to them, with a melancholy smile, of dignity and graceful pity ! He started at the sight of her, as if he really thought her apparition (only) had visited his fancy : but when she had advanced some paces forward, he attempted to spring from his seat, as if forgetful and regardless of his weaken'd state of health, and ran, as well as he was able, to meet her, with a bended knee, snatching her hand with trembling rapture, awed by diffidence and overjoy'd surprize ! Ah I, cry'd he, awake ! or does this heavenly dream deceive my senses ? No,

no, 'tis my Almira! this dear hand! this form! cannot deceive me. But to find you here, thus unexpectedly, thus happily, I hope, to call to life again a wretch who has so long, alas! existed but to misery! ever since his eyes were suffered to meet those angelic beams with pleasure. How it can be, must equally astonish and delight me!

You see, replied Amanda, kindly, what you owe intirely to Bellmont. (Observing that poor Almira was quite silent, and to appearance unable to reply).

To Bellmont, cry'd Florello, is that possible? good heaven for ever bless that matchless wond'rous friend! a friend so newly found, and yet thus soon, and thus amazingly, to heap the first and best of obligations on me! How has this been, or can it really be? Where is he, madam (turning to Amanda) that he should be prevented thus partaking in my present happiness? My overflowing gratitude (if it is to him I owe the sight of my Almira) burns with impatience to make some return. Tho' insufficient,

sufficient, all my thanks must be, for such unhop'd relief (from him) as this.

If such you call it, Sir, you owe it all indeed to him, return'd Almira, and only him; nor let me take a merit that is so much another's. 'Twas his report concerning you, alone prevailed on me, who happen'd to be at my friend Amanda's, to come in person, to account for a behaviour, which were inexcusable in me, had I not thought there was apparent reason for it; and which, if that paper does not justify, I own myself to seek for an apology, for giving you pain I never wish'd you. She then deliver'd to him the letter before-mentioned, wrote by Crudelia, which he immediately perused. And in that moment Amintor (who had been walking for some time in an adjacent orchard, by his mamma's desire, as she imagin'd it might not be agreeable to both these lovers, to have him there as witness of that amiable weakness, that is seldom wanting upon such occasions) brought up a letter to Amanda, which one of her servants had just then brought. She, ha-

ving opened it, found it was within directed to Almira, and gave it her ; who saw immediately that it came from her old honest servant Prudence. And the contents were these :

“ My dear young lady.

I Hope that theese wil finde you wel in helth. I have don nothin else but dremed of you, by day and nite, since you sat off from us : sure nothin bad can have befallin you, that my poore hart shoould ake aboute you so. However, that is not the onely mater of my riting nether ; for, good lac a day, who woould a thouht it ! but your ant has takin somwat now so much to hart, and thinkin that as how may hap she has not longe to live, hopes peteufly to see you.

“ Her favarite maed has been up and downe with me, a powr of times, ever sinse you went, aboute you. And hereing you were out of towne, and that I knew indede as where, and woould not tel her ; maddam herself, whoose sinfes
fudingly

suddenly came to her, to evere wons surprise, has sent this leter for you, and disired me to sende it to you with all speede, and she did not forgit me nether for it.

“ Do, I beg you, my good lady, come and se her, out of onely charitee; for I have heerd strang thinges aboute her, —al cannot be rite.

Yours, for ever to comande,

Tel deth,

PRUDENCE.

P.S. My dater Sharlote gives her umble dutee to you, my dear lady, and to good mistres Cleona.”

Inclosed, there was the following letter :

“ My dearest niece.

I Am, I find now, drawing very near my end ; but cannot die in peace till I have your forgiveness, and your prayers for me.

“ My unkind usage of you, often, has deserved your leaving me at such a time ; nor can I blame you for it. Yet you are still a stranger to the worst of it ; which the inclosed unhappy paper will too well acquaint you with. I send it you, for fear I should not live to see you ; that I, in death, may clear the innocent, whom I, in life, have injured. —Prevail upon Florello, if possible, as well as your dear self, to pardon me. Guilt is, itself, the sharpest of all punishments. O ! that I could have known that sooner ! I never have enjoyed my health, or peace of mind, since I perpetrated that last black deed ! for Providence, alas ! is just in all things !—and I have more to answer for.

“ I have

“ I have yet more, my dear, to say to you, than I have power or strength to write ; for it is with pain and difficulty I can write at all. The little power, that has just now been lent me, is to do justice only, I am certain.

“ For pity’s sake, I beg it of you, let me see you quickly ! if you have any pity for your too-undeserving, but now sincerely penitent, and

Most affectionate aunt,

CRUDELIA.”

Florello, who by this time had twice read over, with visible amazement, the letter which Almira had just given him, waited impatiently her having finished the reading of hers ; and the first moment he met her eyes recovering their lids from off the paper in her hand, he cried, For heaven’s sake ! madam, what does all this mean ? I am a stranger to these base contents ; tho’ some vile hand, I see, has named me in them. Tell me,
I be-

I beseech you, where it came from ?
for I am all astonishment !

Just then, Amanda, who had observed his frequent change of countenance, insisted on his taking a glass of wine with some reviving drops.

O, sir, (returned Almira) I am as greatly overjoyed to have it in my power to answer that just question, as I am overwhelmed with recollective shame, that I should give, too easily, such credit to it. But let these letters be my best apology at present. I will afterwards inform you how, and where, I found the other.

She then gave him those letters she had just received ; and was obliged to quit the room immediately : for the variety of strong conflicting passions she had to encounter, all at once, threaten'd the over-powering of her almost-fainting spirits. Amanda, seeing this, went to her, and conducted her into the other room ; where tears soon proved a kind relief to her.

Flo-

Florello being intent upon those papers she had given him, did not observe her discomposure.—And Cleone, (who was now no longer to be Alexis) being in the adjacent chamber, resuming her own habit, prepared a glass of water, with some drops, for her; which so restored her spirits, that she was soon enabled to return to her deserted lover; who with mingled joy, and curiosity, (to be still more informed concerning what he had now read) was waiting with impatience for their coming in again.

Amanda begged Almira to return alone; being convinced, that, upon such occasions, a third person's company can willingly be spared; adding, however, that she would presently be with her, to engage them both to let her dear Fidelio be a sharer in the joy of such a happy reconciliation! as she might now, she hoped, insist on seeing.

Almira bowing, smiled consent to it, and left them.—But she had no sooner shewn herself again, to the expecting eyes

eyes of poor Florello; than, as she crossed the room (with a confusion that admits of no description, but which deprived her of the power to let her eyes meet his) he ran, tho' faintly, and caught her in his arms, with silent rapture! and, for some moments, pressed her to his rebounding bosom, while his head reclined upon her shoulder, to recover breath and strength from extasy! Then, soon assuming courage, from exulting consciousness of happy innocence! (and willing to demand his own imagined due reward) he sealed repeatedly upon her lips, his happy sense of restoration to her favour:—while she, depressed by conscious shame, (finding herself now his inferior, from her having accused him wrongfully) wanted both the power, and will, then, to repulse him strongly. So great an influence has every sense of felt defects, or wrong done to another, on a reflecting virtuous christian's mind.

I see, cried he, my dearest angel! now, with joy unspeakable, that I am the happiest man alive! You have, unknowingly,

knowingly, convinced me of it.—No, I should be the basest wretch on earth, could any charms, but thine, gain entrance to my heart! believe me, I have there no room for more. And this too-plausible distrust, and due resentment, all (however painful to me hitherto) establishes my bliss upon a happy basis. Could you have acted otherwise, when under such seemingly just suspicions, I had been now less happy! for I am, by this, convinced, Almira cannot, does not hate me.

And when, returned Almira, I inform you, that I found that paper close by the chair you rose from, when you went away, the day you visited me last, find some excuse for my credulity. Alas! I cannot, for myself, one more sufficient. Tho' I am now, I own, less satisfied with that, than I have been.

No, no, returned Florello; I will find no excuse, no pardon, for it; but upon one condition.—You have hurt my honour, in its tenderest part, I can assure you, and doubted its devoted
love

love of you! and I insist on having satisfaction for it. — You must, this very day, permit me to present you to my parents, as one, who could alone, thro' heaven! restore again, to life and health, and them, their half-lost son.

The time, my charmer, is almost expired; why would you fix such cruel fetters on it! Will you not lighten it one week, for all I have lately suffered?

I may, replied Almira, if Florello asks me; after I have reminded him that I had once his promise, he would not desire to deprive me of a day, within the limits of my resolution. I must, you see, immediately return to town; and yet, alas! how shall I bear to see the grief of this unhappy aunt, tho' happy penitent! But you must, sir, support me in it; and, as a principal concerned, your presence may, indeed, be necessary to her quiet. My friend Amanda will, I am sure, oblige me with her company; and I shall stand in need of all such kind assistance upon this occasion.

Amanda,

Amanda, just then came in, and told them she was sent for home to dinner, where she insisted they should all accompany her; which, they consenting to, Florello's coach conveyed them thither in a few minutes.

END of VOL. I.





